

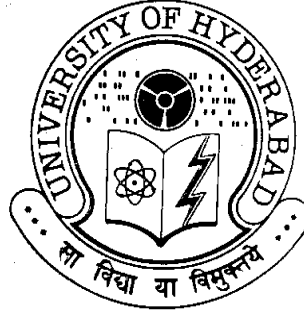
# AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF RELIGION AMONG THE GUJJARS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

A thesis submitted during 2014 to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment for the award of Ph.D Degree in Anthropology.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**An Anthropological Study of Religion among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir**” submitted by Subeno Kithan bearing Regd.No.**08SAPH04** is a bonafide work carried by her under my supervision and guidance which is a plagiarism free thesis. The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Subeno Kithan, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**An Anthropological Study of Religion Among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir**” submitted by me under the supervision of **Prof. N. Sudhakar Rao** is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir was possible because of help from many sources.

Firstly, I thank Almighty God for all the wisdom, health and guidance that helped me complete my work.

I am extremely grateful to my teacher and guide Prof N. Sudhakar Rao, who has been so patient and has been a constant source of encouragement and motivation right from the very beginning.

I am immensely indebted to my dear friend Maggie Holmes, who has been a wonderful inspiration especially for encouraging me to take up this research and do something different.

I would also like to acknowledge Ron Albrecht and Family (Jammu and Kashmir) for their constant support and encouragement from the first day in Jammu, for introducing me to the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, for the help in getting various contacts for my research. I also thank Uncle Jon and Aunt Jerri for helping me in various ways during my stay in Jammu.

I am deeply indebted to the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir particularly of Sanasar, Jammu (Vijaypur), Udhampur and Riyasi for sharing their lives with me and trusting me. I thank Lala Abdul Rouf and family (Jindral), Rafiq and family (Srinagar), Shamujddin and family (Vijaypur), Zenab Bibi and family (Jammu), Mohammad Israel and family (Talwara, Reasi) Farman and family (Jammu), Tara and family (Sanasar) and many others who have hosted me, helped me and encouraged me in my quest for understanding their lives and faith. I thank all of them for introducing me to a reality of their lives and accepting me as a daughter, a sister and a friend. Studying another culture is not easy and it takes a lifetime to understand any community. I am glad that I had the opportunity to meet such wonderful people who taught me new things at the same time made

me realize that they are also not different from the rest of us who have dreams and aspirations of living a good life. The unfortunate thing is that they are still marginalized and not given enough attention by the state. Their daily struggles and hard life humbled me greatly and made me realize and question the helplessness of a scholar who had come to collect information from the people getting everything from them yet not being able to give them anything in return. I remain indebted to them.

The humble stay in buffalo hut in Sanasar along with the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars who had come up in their summer homes from different parts of Jammu and other low lying areas was a wonderful start and everything was exciting in the beginning. In the process of my fieldwork, I also had the wonderful opportunity to be part of their seasonal migration with Rafiq the Bakarwal's family which was an exhilarating experience. This made me realize that their lifestyle is not a cup of tea, and they do it for their survival. The constant sharing of lunali chai by the Bakarwals and the lipton chai with the Dodhi Gujjars were precious moments spent. Their generosity of being able to share the little they have with me will always be cherished. The cool weather in Sanasar and the hot uncomfortable weather in Jammu, the tedious seasonal migration that these people go through made me realize how they have to struggle in their everyday life which is not easy. I am extremely humbled by the entire experience.

I thank the School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad for giving me the platform to undertake Master's programme, M.Phil programme as well as complete my Ph.D from the University.

The privilege to be able to carry out fieldwork successfully was possible due to RGNF JRF-SRF fellowship. Without the help of the grant for this fellowship, it would not have been possible to undertake fieldwork in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India. I duly thank the fellowship committee for granting me the opportunity.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my all my teachers at the Department of Anthropology- Prof. Venkat Rao, Prof. Siva Prasad, Prof. K.K Misra, Dr. B.V Sharma, Dr. Tharakan, Dr. Romesh and Mr. Sheik Abdul Munaf. Thank you all for your constant encouragement and support.

I am also grateful for the support and supervision by Prof. Sudhakar Reddy (CFCS) who has been a member of my doctoral committee.

I am also indebted to the office staff of the Department of Anthropology and would like to thank Mr. Adinarayanan, Mr. Ashok, Mr. Shekar, and Mr. Niranjana for their help whenever required.

I thank all my dear friends from the department, Akhono, Mhonyani, Aso, Vikhepu, Apparao, Sirisha, Shyam, Anand, Raj Kumar, Alok and Kusum who whose encouragement were always there for me.

I am also thankful to all my dear friends who were there to support and encourage me from the very beginning especially - Khreinuo, Udita, Lydia, Lothunglo, Neinu, Merenlemla, Vitsou, Pitheli, Salomi, Jasmine, Resenmenla, Limakumla, Imkumnaro, Krukulu, Konchem, Sashilemla, Mijing, Tejal, Saritha, Pushpa, Sentitemsu, Atazo, Rokuovituo, Samuel Wati and Anthony.

I am also thankful to my friends Medo, Gaithuan, Chubamenla, Thungja and Lydia whose encouragement and prayers were always there for me.

I thank my colleagues at TISS Guwahati, Navaneeta, Shalini, Sawmveli, Sohini, Abhinandan, Joseph and Sanjay for their encouragement and suggestions on my work.

I also express my deepest gratitude to my family and community of faith especially Uncle Issac and Ruth aunty, Uncle Joy and Claris aunty, Uncle Jessen and Rebecca chechi, Uncle Roy and Josephine chechi, Bro Sanjog and Betty, and many others for their constant encouragement and prayers.

Last but not the least, I am thankful to my beloved parents-Ayo and Apo and siblings - Ben and Mhono for the hope they had in me all this while, for patiently supporting me. I love you all.

*Subeno Kithan*

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## **PLAGIARISM TEST REPORT**

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Background

The present study explores the importance of religion among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, who are an ethnic community leading a pastoral nomadic life in the hill ranges of Himalayas. Even though they are sporadically mentioned in some of the available literature, many aspects about their religious life largely remain unexplored. While some of them continue as Hindus, most of them in Jammu and Kashmir are followers of Islam who claim to have embraced it a few centuries ago. The present study focuses on the Muslim Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir and the aspects linking to their identity as pastoral nomads.

The term 'religion' originally comes from the Latin term 'religio' meaning to "read again," or "to read over and over". In other words, it means "a painstaking sense of duty, concentrating fully on what one is supposed to do." (Ernst 2004: 38-39). Religion is one of the most intriguing features of human society with which people relate with a world beyond their normal everyday lives. It is universal. Though understood in different ways, and expressed through rituals and devotion that evolves a sense of piety, religion infests human lives deeply. Hence exploring and understanding religion is vital in understanding human behaviour in society. Religion presents to us a complex feature of human character that connects individuals, communities and the world to a divine world which is a subjective reality. It further gives a perspective to one's social life along with the understanding of the cosmos. It

influences our everyday lives, in its political, social and economic aspects. Many scholars of religion prefer discussing religion from the point of its components or characteristics. Some feel that the term “religion” is an ambiguous term, which comprises of two major components - the religious experience or faith (internal dimension), and cumulative traditions (external dimension). The former is generally of immediate concern to religious practitioners and professionals while the latter includes everything from “scriptures, ritual practice, morality, art and architecture, teaching or doctrine, family and community, the political order, and the like” (*ibid*: 50). Anthropologists, sociologists and schools of religious studies focus primarily on the latter aspect, where again there are differences in the scope of their disciplines.

This chapter is concerned with the statement of the problem of present research, anthropological concerns of religion, review of literature, research questions, and significance of the study and organization of the thesis.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

As a proselytizing religion, Islam has spread from its place of origin to different continents and communities where it has been adapted by people of different social-economic backgrounds to their specific contexts. In this respect, the present research is about the Muslim Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir who are pastoral semi-nomads; who are in fact undergoing the process of sedentarization. Originally Hindu, they are believed to have embraced Islam mostly during the reign of Aurangzeb (AD 1658-1707), the Mughal monarch of 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the given historical background of religious conversion, semi-nomadic life, and influence of modernity, it is important to study the religion of Gujjars. The Gujjars live in the midst of Kashmiri Muslims,

Kashmiri Hindus, Sikh and other religious groups. Further, there are other ethnic groups like Gaddis, Dogras, Balti, Dards, Ladhakis and so on. The interactions with these ethnic, non-ethnic and religious communities increased when they started settling beside them. But even in this context, they have maintained their own identities as ethnic groups as well as Muslims while adapting to settled life. As a result they are facing certain challenges in their traditional life and in the practice of religion. The Gujjars engage themselves in various theological debates and conflicting discourses and interpretations while confronting the challenges that they face in the new situation. The present study attempts to examine the religion of Gujjars in a complex situation.

### **Anthropological studies of religion**

Anthropologists have produced credible documentation of simple societies that have their own set of beliefs and practices which govern their worldview and actions. In their discussion on religion they have focused on the intricacies of its practice, the perceptions about the supernatural and its significance in the lives of its followers. The way people manifest their reverence through prayer, offerings, fasting etc., are items of fascination for the anthropologist, as all these aspects shape their everyday lives and thus satiates the anthropologist's quest for knowledge. While focusing on religious beliefs and practices, the ideas of "ethos" and "worldview" cannot be ignored. The ethos "represent a way of life", while the worldview is represented as "an actual state of affairs" and both go together. Anthropological studies on religion started with propositions on the origin and progress of religious thought such as animism (Tylor 1871), ancestral worship (Spencer and Gillen 1899), animatism

(Marrett 1909), progression from magic to religion to science (Frazer 1958) etc. Several studies by anthropologists have revealed enormous variations within the very conceptualization of the divine, the supernatural, beliefs and practices. Therefore it becomes all the more problematic to define what religion or what the subject matter of belief should be. Dissatisfied with the conception of religion by Tylor, Frazer and others among the 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists, Durkheim defines,

“religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set part and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called Church, all those who adhere to them” (1912: 62).

But even this definition is not entirely acceptable to anthropologists, and they have not been able to resolve the problem even today. Douglas (1970) claimed that religion is a big unspecialized field and needs more than a niche, and it is social anthropology which permeates the whole subject, i.e the study of religion comes under social anthropology. According to her, there is enormous literature on religion in the modern world, but little guidance on how to relate its inferences to the other branches of social thought. Geertz (1973) also laments that no theoretical advances have been made in anthropological work on religion. He gives his own definition which shall be discussed later. El Guindi (1977) defines religion as seen in specific communities which make it a way of life for that group, the way they think about the world around them. For her, religion as a category is fluid and contextual, and any attempt to define it too narrowly runs a risk. Ortner looks at religion as a meta system that solves problems of meaning generated in large part (though not entirely) by the social order, by grounding that order within a theoretically ultimate reality

within which those problems will 'make sense' (1978: 152). It is clear that religion does act as an agent to solve the problems of human heart, the unseen balm, which heals and gives strength to those who hope. According to Fuller, religion helps us in our quest to discover the purpose of our existence, creates values of right and wrong, and how to behave with one another as people living together in a community and in relation to nature and is seen as something powerful (2003: xiii). Thus, defining religion is a difficult task even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but the above definitions and perceptions make clear the scope and the field of religion. Anthropologists have been attempting to understand religion in a variety of approaches which shall be briefly discussed.

### **Approaches to study religion**

Anthropological studies of religion that had their beginning in the late nineteenth century were highly influenced by evolutionary thought. They derived assumptions about culture from the theory of Darwinism, which propagated that culture develops, or evolves in a uniform and progressive manner. The evolutionary sequence postulated have been varied: animism - ancestral worship; animatism – animism; polytheism – henotheism – monotheism, magic – religion – science etc. However, later anthropologists upheld the principles of cultural relativism and holism and concentrated on understanding the local, small scale population with prolonged fieldwork involving participant observation and ethnography, in carrying out their studies systematically. The 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists followed in the footsteps of earlier anthropologists who continue to inspire them but with a more refined and

sophisticated framework. They approached religion from psychological, functional, symbolic, structuralist, Marxist, biological and cognitive perspectives.

The psychoanalysis and personality studies have had an increasing bearing on the anthropologists of the later years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who studied human societies with a cultural orientation. Their Freudian premise in this case is that religious practices can be usefully interpreted as expressions of unconscious psychological forces<sup>1</sup>. Ruth Benedict's 'Patterns of culture' (1934) wherein the configurational approach to culture has been proposed is basically grounded on the psychological approach to religion. She explains the cultural patterns of some American Indians from certain personality types expressed in religious beliefs and practices.

The functionalist perspective that superseded the psychological perspective considered society as a self-regulating system in which religion, economic organization, and kinship formed parts of an organic whole. Each part has a function in the organic whole. The followers of this perspective are greatly influenced by Durkheim and anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski (1944, 1948), Evans Pritchard (1937, 1965), Brown (1952) etc. The realm of the sacred is defined by the attitude people have towards it - rituals are sacred if they are performed with reverence and awe. Numerous functional aspects of religion include-providing comfort; sanctions on social, economic and political norms and institutions, aid

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<sup>1</sup> Freud (1985)

ecological adaptation and unify the social group; this shall be discussed in greater detail later.

Symbolic approach dominated the anthropological study of religion in the late twentieth century as researchers became increasingly concerned with the concept of meaning. The symbolic aspect of religion was first recognized by Evans Pritchard (1965), and was successfully followed by several anthropologists most notably Victor Turner (1967) and Mary Douglas (1970). In this approach, religion is studied through symbols; of which the meanings are given by the participants to the elements of religion and rituals, and anthropologists try to offer interpretations. Clifford Geertz (1973) considers culture as a symbolic system and locates religion in the cultural stream; he bases his approach on the phenomenological strand and psychological interpretation.

Influenced by Karl Marx, Godelier (1975) considers religion as a reflection of the real world in the human mind. He postulates class formation with emergence of shamans and priests who control the supernatural world. For Marxist anthropologists, society and culture are natural and these are governed by general laws of the nature or earthly characters but not divine (Bloch 1986). Biological, neurological and cognitive approaches are slowly gaining popularity and may dominate the future anthropological studies of religion. Social or Cultural anthropologists recognize that studying the religious beliefs of a particular society or culture is integral to understanding the culture itself, and comparing religious beliefs across cultures provides a more comprehensive explanation of human behaviour as a whole. Anthropology tries to understand religion in a very distinct way and explains

- not what religion is-but why religion is important in people's lives. In this context several anthropological texts with the title 'Anthropology of Religion'<sup>2</sup> have boomed in the recent years which shows the importance given to it by contemporary anthropologists.

There has been a shift in the study of religion from that of simple societies to understanding religion at a broader context by extending the study to complex societies and the impact of migration, globalisation and so on, on religious behaviour, expectations and so on. Religious beliefs and practices of the preliterate as well as that of the contemporary advanced literate society have been explored and studied. Thus, we find fields like 'anthropology of Islam' or 'anthropology of Christianity' etc., which have become anthropological research areas in the recent times (20<sup>th</sup> century). Further, when we study major world religions like Islam and Christianity, the concepts like "mysticism," "symbol", "piety," "worship," "faith," "sacredness," "tradition," "virtue," "spirituality," even "religion" feature endlessly. Anthropologists so often grapple to find an explanation for these features which need to be understood. For those who practice Islam, the Qur'an gives the perspective of the relationship between the cosmos and human beings. It reveals three levels simultaneously- metaphysical, naturalistic and human; which are all interdependent. (Haq 2001: 146). In other words, all the elements function in relation to one another and it is manifested in the everyday conversations about faith and practice. Since the present study pertains to Muslim Gujjars it is important to discuss the issues related to anthropological study of Islamic or Muslim societies.

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<sup>2</sup> Glazier (1997), Bowie (2000), Hackett (2005), Cannell (2006) et al.

## **Review of Literature**

Anthropologists have produced and accumulated a large body of literature since nineteenth century and a review of it all would go beyond the scope of the present study. Hence the review of literature is limited mainly to the Anthropology of Islam and Islamic Anthropology which has been revived in the recent past in the study of Muslim communities. Also, a brief review of the studies pertaining to Indian Muslims and Gujjars is undertaken, which only shows that there is hardly any study that focuses exclusively on the religion of the Gujjars which is the subject matter of the present study.

## **Studying Islam or Muslim societies**

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a large number of anthropologists have been writing about Islam within the context of particular people, places and times, some of them after doing extensive fieldwork while others without it (Geertz 1960, 1968, 1973; Gilsenan 1982; Asad 1986; Ahmed 1983; 1986; Abu-Lughod 1986; El Guindi 2003, 2008; Mahmood 2005; Marsden 2005; Marranci 2008). When it comes to understanding Islam in academic discourses, we come across enormous amount of literature on studies of Islam in Southeast Asia and Middle East. Many scholars have tried to understand, compare and contrast Islam practiced in South Asian countries as against Middle East. In fact many times, scholars who write on Islam fasten upon the Middle East as the 'natural' context of Islam (Houben 2003). This is not befitting as more than half of the world's Muslim populations live in East Afghanistan and there are countries like Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which is home to world's largest Muslim populations. The latter are treated in academic discourses as

‘Muslims on the periphery’ or ‘Islam from the edge’ (Gottschalk 2004:9). Further it may be noted that Muslim scholars who write about Islamic beliefs and practices are very skeptical of the way orientalist and western scholars have presented their views on Islam. Whenever western anthropologists or other non-Muslim scholars study Muslim societies, they come under the category of “Anthropology of Islam”. However, there is disagreement over the concept of Anthropology of Islam, some claim that it is a narrow representation of Muslims or Muslim communities and as an alternative, Islamic anthropology has been proposed by for better representation and practice of Islam among Muslim communities which is discussed later.

### **Anthropology of Islam**

Many western scholars have been critical of the narrow representation of Islam in the Western world. Ernst (2004) a western scholar of Islam, in his work, ‘Rethinking Islam Contemporary World’, condemned the western biases towards Islam and also criticised the way orientalist writers on Islam have been highly irrational in their approach towards understanding Islam. He quotes,

“Muslims are human beings-meaning they have history and that they live in multiple social and historical situations defined by economic class, ethnicity, gender, and all the factors that ordinary human beings have to deal with.” (2004: xix).

He brings to notice why there has to be the concept of “the Muslim world” which is always kept in opposition to the “the west” (*ibid*: 4). This according to him is a result of Eurocentric bias which developed as a result of history of colonialism (*ibid*: 8).

The prevalent paradox existing in the debate on religion is that of the ‘ideal’ or ‘lived’ religion, ‘global’ or ‘local’ religion etc. Studies on South East Asia particularly expose such assumptions as seen in the works of many anthropologists and sociologists working on Islam and Muslims (Geertz 1968, Ahmad 1981, Gilsenan 1982). The pan Islamic movement in the early twentieth century across the Islamic world has influenced the development of Southeast Asian Islam. It was meant to purify the practices of Islam, which was influenced by the local cultures. It was not at all “conservative” as it developed as a modernizing response to European domination.

Further, most of the researches on Islam in Southeast Asia reveals that the Islam practiced there is more moderate compared to that of the practice of Islam in the Middle East, it accommodates local indigenous traditions (Ernst 2004: 156-157). In this connection, we find the usages of terms like “Morrocon Islam” and “Indonesian Islam”. Also, here there are divisions within the people practicing Islam as they see differences in the way they carry out their faith. The classifications of “nominal Muslims” who do not follow rules of Islamic conduct are contrasted with that of those who are “more devout Muslims” in Geertz’s (1960) study around the *Modjojuto* area in Java, Indonesia. He classifies the Javanese social strata into elite (*prijaji*), middle class (*santri*) and the low class (*abagan*). He emphasises on the significance of religion in the bringing about social transformation in the modern society.

In academic discourses on Islam, the tautology continues as the scholars who study Islam create their own terms and conditions, which suite their environment. There

are categories like 'Arab Islam', 'Indian Islam', 'Indonesian Islam' and 'African-American Islam', each one claiming their own unique characteristics or either being more closer to the 'core' of the 'original' religion, while others demonstrate the influence of non-Muslims (Gottschalk 2004:13). Accordingly, anthropologists like Varisco (2005), Asad (1986) reflect the displeasure over such tautologies and the way Muslims have been studied by anthropologists.

Many scholars have come up with their own theories of what Islam is. For many others, Islam is not a religion but an overall societal ideology (Arjomand 1993, Esposito 1984). Accordingly Islam's potential is to negotiate ideological extremes and protect human beings from crossing the extremes (Ba-Yunus 2002). Many also agree that Islam does not exist only in a religious or exclusively Islamic environment and has always been influenced by others living in the same space (Ahmad and Reifeld 2004). Even in the earliest studies on Islamic societies, as in the works of Khaldun (1967), he mentions the existence of conflicts between sedentary, urban Islam and the Islam of the nomadic tribes that shaped medieval Islam in important ways. This also reveals the dynamic nature of Islam and the way it is practiced in different settings.

Islam has also been studied by sociologists of religion much earlier than anthropologists, who were interested in one of world's major religions and its role in the complex societies and have thus brought about the institutional aspects of religion. Houben (2003:151-152) in his article "Southeast Asia and Islam" talks about the four approaches with regard to understanding studies of Islam in South Asia. First is the philological tradition, where the culture transfer from Middle East,

Persia and India, has had a deep impact on Islam in South Asia. Second category of studying is in the light of religious and legal studies. Here, Islam is a system of ideas situated in Middle East with Arabic as its medium and further, the practice of Haj links the other Muslims with the Arabic world and its orthodox streams. Thirdly, studies on Islam in Southeast Asian regions are through ‘Anthropological-sociological’ angle. The focus is on the various ethnic groups which developed their own ways of practicing the religion. Fourthly, we have Islamic studies within the political economy of South Asia. The emphasis is on accommodating Islam within the political nation and the relationship between state and Islam in Southeast Asia. This categorization however is arbitrary and with many overlaps.

It is true that Muslims themselves can bring out a better analysis of what they are doing and what they do as seen in the works of El Guindi (2008) in her book ‘By Noon Prayer’, which I want to place under the scope of an “Islamic Anthropology”. The reason being that the socio-cultural aspects related to religion are more or less common to all Muslims including those scholars who are Muslims as well. It places them in a better position to understand people’s worldview and symbolic representations. On the other hand, the works of non-Muslim anthropologists have several limitations because of their unfamiliarity with the religious intricacies. However, despite not knowing the Qur’an intricately or participating in the acts of worship, they can contribute in the objective presentation of the culture, which is their outmost concern. One should also keep in mind that not all Muslim societies are dominated by the learned culture of Arabic and not everybody is literate in that. There can also be disadvantages of being an insider as one’s objectivity could be at

stake as their own personal attitude and outlook towards the particular faith may overshadow the research, however objective one may like to be. 'Anthropology of Islam', can therefore be put aside as a term for studies on Islam that brought out the very essence of understanding people and their practices as central to their way of life and nothing less. Several Anthropologists have produced remarkable studies of Muslim societies, bringing out the essence of how religion plays its part in people's lives, or in other words, what do people do in reality.

Gellner (1981) in his study on the Moroccan Berber groups and also North African Muslim societies argues that Islam has been able to prevent itself from deviating from the normative ideology despite the social changes taking place around it. Its strict traditions which revolve around law, literacy and discipline prevented it from secularizing. Gilsenan (1982) who studied Islam in Arab society reveals the superficial displaying of religious attitudes by people he encountered such as being pious and religious in public, but secular in private. According to him, real Islam is an egalitarian force, which strives for unity of all the members of the community and a part of the global struggle against local corruption and alien power (1982:10-11). Further, for him, real Islam is free of such mediations with God and is embodied in the Qur'an and the traditions (*ibid*: 11). Gilsnan says,

"Islam is a word that identifies varying practices, representations, symbol, concept and worldview within the same society and between different societies." (*ibid*: 19).

Another noteworthy work on Muslim community is by Marsden (2005), an anthropologist who worked with the Chitral people of Pakistan's North Frontier region for more than ten years. In his work among the Chitralis he attempts to

understand what does it mean to be a Muslim in Chitral? Or what does it mean to live a Muslim life? His evocative study of the Chitral region challenges all stereotypes of Muslims. His study points to Chitrali society's experiences shared by ordinary individuals whose thought provoking comments on Islam has enriched his understanding of the Chitrali Muslims (2005:7). Through an exploration of the everyday experiences of both men and women, he shows that the life of a good Muslim in Chitral consists of a vibrant life, where people enjoy poetry, dancing and critical debate. Mardsen brings in the people's classification of religion in terms of 'open minded' vs 'narrow minded'. The former being able to engage in critical conversations about Islam, can write meaningful and thought provoking poetry, to be able to sing and dance and so on. While the later characteristics include having a low opinion about women, reading too many religious books and show emotional attitude towards religion. (*ibid*:120)

Geertz (1968) who has contributed immensely to studies of Islam, especially in Indonesia and Morocco reveals the differences in the way religion influences the moods and motivations in different groups. In Morocco, the spiritual climate involves activism, moralizing and intense individuality, and while in Indonesia it is the opposite with inwardness, aesthetic sensibility and radical dissolution of individuality.

When we also look at the way feminist anthropologist on Islam, Saba Mahmood (2005), whose who has contributed impeccable work on feminism and Islam, through an ethnographic study of urban women mosque movement in Egypt. She has focused on the piety movement among Egyptian women which started as a result

secularization or westernization that has impacted their society. The mosque movement aims to educate ordinary Muslims not only perform proper performance of religious duties and acts of worship but also to organize their daily conduct in accordance with the principles of Islamic piety and virtuous behavior. Mahmood highlights that women's piety movement is also highly political. Her study reveals how the women's mosque movement is not just a piety movement but also has brought in changes within the larger Egyptian society, which includes changes in people's way of life, in dress, speech; put standards of what is deemed proper for entertainment of adults and children, who should manage finances at home, etc. Her study reveals the importance given to agency, how as human beings, all have the innate desire of freedom, and in order to fulfill it, the human agency, challenges the social norms through acts (2005:5). She explores how the "notion of human agency most often invoked by feminist scholars-one that locates agency in the political and moral autonomy of the subject-has been brought to bear upon the study of women involved in patriarchal religious traditions such as Islam."(*ibid*:7)

In this regard, in the contemporary researches, scholars are exploring the new ways of understanding religion from a broader perspective, though in one sense the aspect of ideal and lived Islam cannot be totally ignored. Anthropological studies on Islam also brought in the dynamics of dualism quite clearly which was popular until sometime back when it was severely criticised by contemporary anthropologists. According to Ahmad (1981), there are two perspectives to study Islam. The first looks at Islam as the unfolding of a common uniform pattern that as a world religion it is supposed to signify and represent. The other sees Islam as evolving in response

to local demands within each Islamic country or population. According to him, in the former view, Islam is credited with an autonomous role in which its nature in each country or population will ultimately remain limited within the fundamental orientations of Islam. In the latter view, Islamic societies throughout the world, despite the unity imposed upon them by a common adherence to a universal religion, have both the potential and the possibility of creating a distinctive pattern of belief shaped and ordered by their temporal and environmental conditions. The dualism operating within Islam makes the study of Islam and its beliefs and practices more vibrant and accommodative. Further, he has also written on Islamic practices including the customs and religious practices centering a Muslim life along with the operation of an ideal and lived Islam.

In the online discussion posted by the researcher on the question, of how one could study Islam without the usual practice of classifying between ‘ideal and lived Islam’, the response was quite interesting. Most of the respondents expressed apprehension over the way Islam has been categorised and studied mostly in the context of “Ideal and lived experiences”. One of them, MSA, the informant questions the usage of the word “Ideal and real Islam” saying that

“Ideal and Real Islam are not the real categories...it depends on the interpretation of Islamic texts. There is not a single interpretation of holy book which could be considered as representing ideal Islam. And well, Ideal Islam, never existed. Lived Islam is not an exclusive category. It’s basically combination of local cultures, traditions and Islamic rituals. Hence, different Islams in different countries. In some cultures, people follow their own traditional cultures, except a few Islamic rituals and beliefs. It would not be fair to call it either Islamic anthropology or anthropology of Islam. Such kinds of studies require a different of category/name with more adequate tools for research and analysis.”

There are many others who have mentioned that there is hardly any anthropological book which does not use the ideal vs lived Islam dichotomy. AB, another informant also agrees to this point. AB further agrees to MSA and quotes,

“To label “ideal” is to ignore that a religion has to be practiced by somebody-it does not exist in a vacuum or in some ethereal place where perhaps the “ideal” would survive. Thus, when extremists argue for a return to the “Islam of the Prophet” in the 7th century, they ignore centuries of Islamic law, study, and medicine, the whole array of more than a millennium of achievements, problems, and solutions. Was that “ideal” Islam? It was still “lived” by a distinct group of people in a specific place (Medina) in a specific time (early 7th century CE).”

AB urges further that,

“There are specific religious practices that are obligatory across Islam but those obligatory practices may be carried out in different ways. Rather than going in with that huge “anthropological” viewpoint that is so broad and tends to assume a more monolithic approach, the case study or some other form more appropriate to smaller groups might prove beneficial.”

JW points that there are many books which dichotomise “orthodox” and “folk” Islam and she considers the root of such classification mostly comes from non-Muslims.

The above discussion gives us a glimpse of how scholars today critically look at studies on Islam over the years. The need now is an alternate approach which is beyond the “lived vs Ideal” dichotomy, which is a challenging task. Or the question is if there can be an alternative objective way of studying Muslims or Islam? Also, many scholars critically look at the way anthropologists have over the years studied Muslim societies, especially the issue of emphasizing on *text* and *context* (as in the words of Lukens-Bull: 1999). The debate in anthropology of Islam is on how much one should emphasise on the study of Islamic texts in the anthropology of Islam (Baeq 2014:13,30). Anthropologists like Asad (1986:14) also emphasised that if one

were to study Muslim societies, Anthropologists should do as Muslims do, explore the founding texts-the Qur'an and the Hadith.

### **Islamic Anthropology**

The idea of Anthropology of Islam that focuses on Islam from an anthropological perspective has been criticised by several scholars (Asad 1993, Tapper 1995, Varisco 2005, Marranci 2008). It has been noted that the understanding of the religious system of the Muslims continues to be quite common in the writings on South Asian Islam (Singh 1973:60-80). However, it suffers from serious limitations. Firstly, it confuses the formal religious ideology of Islam with the actual day-to-day beliefs and practices of Muslims (Baig 1974). Secondly, it tends to discourage an appreciation of the variety that characterizes Islam by excluding the consideration of the local traditions of Muslims (Bellah 1965). Western scholars like Varisco (2005) challenge the anthropologist's representations of the Muslims and finds it problematic. According to him,

“the anthropologist observes Muslims in order to represent their representations; only Muslims can observe Islam.” (2005:162).

Such deliberate statements show a critical outlook towards studies on Islam by anthropologists and whether one should take such studies at face value. Marranci (2008) on the other hand laments the non-engagement of the anthropologists with the non-academic world and the mass media taking Hannerz's idea. He further claims that the anthropologist can provide a better understanding of the current political and general debate in Islam and the Muslim world because of its characteristics. Anthropologists can also clarify the notion of Islam and the politics that has been

created by mass media and populist views (Houben 2003:7). However, such a view challenges the whole anthropological exploration and representation which gives a highly biased outlook towards Muslims studied by anthropologists. This is not a valid reason for a critical observation towards the work by the anthropologist.

Another contention in this whole discussion is the issue of the subject itself. Asad (1986:2) in his study comes to remind us of El-Zin (1977) who concludes that if Islam is not an analytical category, there cannot, be such a thing as anthropology of Islam. He says,

“Thus all (religious) expressions of Islam find unity of meaning through two dimensions of these universal conditions: first as expressions of particular form of experience, religion, with certain defined characteristics such as the integration of the worldview and ethos; and second as an historically continuous tradition of meaning in which the original expression and all those following it in time and space do not exist as complete distinct realities. “(1977:232)

In other words, if one keeps such expressions of Islam in mind, then this idea of anthropologically studying Muslims may not be able to meet the expectations. Thus, this idea has been less favoured. Instead, the suggestion is towards introducing something like studying anthropological texts using Islamic approaches which they call Islamic anthropology. According to these groups, the various works on the Muslims so far have been with the Orientalist gaze, i.e., the West (Tapper 1995:185-93) studying the rest and also have neglected the Islamic texts (Asad 1986, Lukens-Bull 1999).The need for relooking at the representation of Western anthropology of Islam is important as the former ignores the literary traditions and spiritual hierarchy and is ahistorical (Tapper 1995:188). However Tapper also warns that too much

emphasise on religious texts means that Islamic beliefs and principles would eventually filter to interpreting the cultural phenomena, and the study becomes Islamic anthropology (*ibid*: 303), which means that it cannot fall under the purview of anthropology of religion (Lukens-Bull 1999).

Studying Muslim societies using Islamic texts have been undertaken during the 1980s by Ba-Yunus and Ahmad (1985), who wrote on *Islamic sociology* which was however, in essence a proposal for Islamic anthropology. Ba-Yunus (2002) has also tried to understand the idea of Islam having the potential of negotiating ideological extremes and also providing common grounds between contrasting characteristics of Islam: like “ascetic spiritualism and obsessive materialism”, “between selfishness and altruism”, “between complete freedom and restriction”. Thus, according to him, the Qur’an presents Islam as a *deen* to guard such extremes (2002:101). For Ahmed (1986), “Islamic anthropology” is,

“the study of Muslim groups by scholars committed to the Universalistic principles of Islam-humanity, knowledge, tolerance-relating micro village tribal studies in particular to the larger historical and ideological frames of Islam. Islam is here understood not as a theology but sociology. The definition thus does not preclude non-Muslims.” (1986: 56).

The idea though not biased, seems too narrow in treating a subject of theology like Sociology, and thus seemingly does not justify the academic motto. It becomes a biased activity at the end of the day however much we may try to define and redefine it. Such idea of an ‘Islamic anthropology’ itself does not stop the problem of authentically representing Muslims as the whole idea becomes different when one start to follow the texts and magnify the daily lives of Muslims with it. It becomes a narrow approach as the focus then is how people are obligated to live out Islam by

strictly following the religious texts. In this way we can miss out the essence of other factors which influences their religious outlook, rather than Islamic texts.

At least 'anthropology of Islam' opens up the possibility of accommodating more ideas without any bias or any particular focus. Here the focus is mainly towards how people think and act as a human being, being influenced by various factors try to fit themselves in the cosmology of good and evil, God and supernatural beings, reward and punishment and in the process end up exploring other possibilities. Marranci (2008) emphasizes the emotions and feelings to be the centre of our studies of Islam i.e., reconsidering the relationship between nature and culture. Varisco also highlights that "*anthropology as a discipline can only explore what it means to be a Muslim...*"(2005:162) as anthropologists can ethnographically present what Muslims do and say rather than going into the textual realms of the Great tradition, which is of a totally different venture altogether.

The debate of anthropologically representing Muslim societies with the right approach still continues, as to whether the text should be given importance or the context (Baeq 2014: 29). This only indicates that there is serious limitation within anthropology to fully explore the dynamics of Islam and its intricacies and objectively represent and interpret it. The problem is due to the lack of anthropological approaches to study Muslim societies (Marranci 2008). Looking at the above discussions, we find that there seem to be a 'tug of war' on the whole idea of who should do research on Muslims, how should one study Muslims and the question of representing the Islamic faith based on outsider's perspective which has been the core of much of anthropological works among Muslims. Such a tumult of

expressions is seen in the academic world regarding studying Muslims and till date no consensus seem to exist, which make the whole effort quite challenging.

### **Studies of Islam in India**

When it comes to understanding the anthropological and sociological researches carried out on Islam in India, the studies range in these three broad categories- Muslim social structure and practice, the sociological study of Islam in India, and the interaction of Muslims with non-Muslims mainly Hindus (Fazalbhoy 1997). The problem here is that since there is no common theoretical framework in anthropology, there seem to be a spurge of ways of representing the Muslim way of life. Scholars generally use the concepts “ideal” and “lived” Islam (Ahmad 1981, Rao 2004). There also seem to be certain hierarchical operations within Islam, where accordingly there is the Islam of the intellect and religious elite, which is highly abstract, formal and legalistic with the control of the scripture and its doctrines in the hands of these few who seem to impose it on the common people (Ahmad 2004: xiv).

Ahmad (1981:15) uses the term the ‘ultimate and formal’ and the ‘proximate and local’, when addressing Islam, but, according to Rao (2004:101) these concepts cease to complement each other and form the ‘common religious system’ they had once been. Rao mentions how concepts like “ideal” (or normative) and the ‘lived’ (or ‘actual’) has been a constant topic for ethnographic investigation in the present times. She encourages that studies should rather engage with the ideas and emotions of the vast majority of Muslims regarding the relationship between their normative

and lived religion. For her, locally lived Islam represents the local cultures and thus presents one with the local identity.

Ahmad (2004:xiii) also points out that many anthropological researches on Muslim societies have contested the way Islam is understood on the basis of written text alone. He differentiates between the ways anthropologists and theologians study religion, where the latter studies the doctrines and the creed of Islam and enlighten the adherents with the basic doctrines and how to live with it. On the other hand, anthropologists are enlightened with the fact that there is more than what is seen as 'preached religion' and the way people actually live it out. This is possible because of the prolonged fieldwork in a particular community and participating with people in their day-to-day activities. One thing also needs to be cleared, is that it is not the duty of anthropologists to define which levels constitute real Islam or not. For the anthropologist, religion as it is practiced is more important as a source of knowledge than the written texts. He focuses on the daily experiences, in this instance, of the local 'Islams' and leaves the study of the theological interpretation to the theologian or the Islamicists (2004: xiv). However, he further admits that, the anthropology of Islam is yet to take shape as there is not much difference between the anthropologists and the theologian's method of isolating their version of Islam, inspite of the fact that they deal with Islam at different levels and focus on different categories of Islam.

Many sociological studies have also focused on 'syncretism' within Islam where the focus had been on the impact of Hinduism on Islam rather than vice versa (Fazalbhoy 1997). One such aspect is the practice of Sufism, which is evident in case of practices within Islam. The concepts of 'syncretic', 'hybrid', and 'liminal'

Muslims offer important opportunities for understanding Muslim groups that appear to transcend normative expectations of behaviour, belief and identity. However, in academic discourses, scholarship must exercise caution while trying the classificatory schema, which can be problematic (Gottschalk 2004:16). Many scholars also think that the word 'syncretism' has been indiscriminately used by colonial and post-colonial authors to describe all kinds of religious movements which appear to them as 'hybrid' or 'ambiguous' (Oberoi 1994:9). Some authors feel that such a vision is because it is closely connected with the notion of orthodoxy and the assumption that each religion must possess a normative, 'correct' form in contradiction to which all other beliefs are regarded as 'heterodox' or 'deviant' (Khan 2004: 211). It is however not easy to debunk such schema of representation as the various expressions within Islam all points to such ideology. Practices within Islam brings out the essence of 'liminality' and 'syncretism', which they themselves claim to be part of their belief, but not accepted by those who are strict adherents of the Qur'an. Hence, there are variations at the local level, where individual societies transform Islam to fit their own unique historical experience, thus creating many meanings and expressions of Islam (Ahmad 2004: xii). This also includes Islam and its practice in the Indian Subcontinent where there are various socio-cultural influences within the practices of Islam which offers great variations at both inter and intra community levels.

In the light of the literature received above the present research orients itself towards understanding the Muslim Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, where a large section of the population is still practicing their age old semi-nomadic tradition of seasonal

migrations with their cattle. This present research attempts to understand how religion is practiced in their everyday lives. It does not attempt to locate itself in either of the binary categories of anthropology of Islam or Islamic anthropology, nor does the present study aim to discredit the knowledge produced in either of these ways. It rather feels that there is a need to explain why the Gujjars practice religion the way they are practicing it.

It is not exploring the ideal pattern and deviations. It is rather to find out the practice of Islam and its interpretation by the people and living as Muslim in the context of their socio-cultural environment. In other words how Gujjars understand, interpret, try to follow and justify their actions pertaining to the adherences to certain symbols, ideologies and practices. The study has adopted for this purpose the theoretical perspectives of Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu and Sherry Ortner which are discussed in great detail in the following chapter.

### **Research Questions**

It is clear from the above discussions that anthropological researches about religion have largely focussed on the religion of the tribes, peasants and non-western communities. However, Geertz changed the trend with his studies on Islam, an organized world religion, and also provided a definition of religion as stated earlier. Concerning the Islam in India there is enormous literature available on its arrival to the sub-continent. Prominent historians like Hassnain (1977), Bamzai (1980), Hasan (2005), Khan (2005), Stein (2007) have mentioned in their works the arrival of Islam to the region and how the local Kashmiris responded to it. However, they do not

write anything about the nomadic communities like the Gujjars and Bakarwals<sup>3</sup>. Nomadic communities have very often been misrepresented or under-represented in the academic literature for quite some time and it is also due to the scarcity of historical materials about these communities. One reason perhaps is their lifestyle. The study does not aim to recover the position of Gujjars and Barkawals in history, rather to document their contemporary religion as it is practiced. They have not attracted researchers as much as the settled communities have. The questions raised here in this context are, how do Gujjars practice Islam being nomadic pastoralists? To what extent do their original beliefs of Hindu religion remain as sediments and influence their practice of Islam? Further, it is important to ask how the Gujjars maintain their identity as nomads as well as adherents of Islamic faith, as they regularly interact with other Hindu neighbours and local Muslims.

### **Significance**

The study follows the trend of a shift in social anthropological study of religion from preliterate societies to the religions of contemporary advanced literate societies. The study attempts to fill the gap in anthropological study of religion among the nomadic tribes in India. It also contributes to the anthropological understanding of Islam in India in general and Muslim tribes in particular. For this purpose the following objectives have been formulated.

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<sup>3</sup> The works of few historians like Munshi (1955), Ibbetson (1974) and Bingley (1978), Balgir (1983), reveals that Gujjars at present are represented both as Hindu and Muslim populations in India originally belonging to common stock and believed to have bifurcated about 1,000 years.

## **Chapterization**

The data collected through an intensive fieldwork to meet the above objectives of the study and the descriptive analysis of the data thereafter has been organized into seven chapters. As can be noted the introduction presents the statement of the problem of the research undertaken and review of literature. The reviews bring to the light the issues, debates and problems in the anthropological studies of Islam. This is followed by the research questions, significance of the study and objectives set for the study.

One important task for the anthropological study of religion is to deal with the definition and methodology. The lack of consensus on these two aspects is both constraint and freedom. For the present study Geertz's definition of religion has been used as the guide that can also provide a methodology. His concepts of 'model of' and 'model for' reality are considered relevant for the study. Along with this to keep the recent trend in anthropological theory in perspective the present study also considers the theory of practice proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1993, 2005) and the critical theory that is attempting to revisit anthropological understanding of culture and subject (Ortner 2005). Besides these, use of social networking site helped in deciphering more information on the topic of Ideal and Lived Islam has helped in giving a direction to the present research. The second chapter gives the details of the research methodology besides information on the study area profile, socio-demographic profile, data collection and challenges of fieldwork.

Gujjar is the generic term applied to pastoral nomadic ethnic communities vis-à-vis Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Hindus, Dogras and others. As migrants they are

believed to have not been original inhabitants but settled down in the recent past, while some are being settled and some other continue as nomadic. Internally the Gujjars are divided as Desi, Dodhi and Bakarwal based on their occupation and migrating nature. However, all of them are Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir unlike their counterparts inhabiting in other states who claim as Hindu. The origin and migration of the Gujjars, identity and tradition, language, social status, economy and social organization, and in addition the intricacies within the ethnic group, in terms of similarities and differences, the classification they make to identify within themselves are examined in third chapter. This chapter focuses on the first objective of the study-To understand the identity and socio-cultural profile of the Gujjars.

The Gujjars conceptualize their world in terms of *ruhani* (the world of spirits) and *duniya/zindagi* (world of existence). The meeting of this two takes place in the sacred spaces and structures and sacred specialists. Within these domains they practice their faith, try to connect with Allah and other spiritual beings. The analysis of these enables one to understand the ideals of Islam via their nomadic lifestyle and various life cycle rituals. Geertz's 'model for' reality is used to examine the above intersections, where, the symbolic structures (consisting of perceptions of Allah and spirits, reward and punishment, paradise and hell) work together to manipulate the pre-existing non symbolic system (i.e., the mundane everyday life activities). The fourth chapter focuses on these aspects which address the second and third objectives of the study.

The world view of the Gujjars, the construction of it, and the direction or guidance for everyday life emanates from the tenets of Islam and outside Islam. Here Geertz's

'model of' reality concept is used to understand the aspect of how Gujjars everyday activities (pre-established non-symbolic systems) which is centered around individuals, family, work, cattle, nomadic lifestyle, sedentary lifestyle, *pir* and *dargah* reverence, ancestral graves, significance of dreams, bring forth attributes of symbol structures (good and evil, paradise and Hell, reward and punishment). Examining the interaction of how the people manipulate the symbol structures to fit it into their everyday activities, helps us in understanding the *model of* aspect of Gujjar religion. The fifth chapter focuses on the second and third objectives of the study that unfolds the living Islam.

The Gujjar religion provides room for division, alternative views when certain dogmas or interpretations are questioned. The practice of religion examines religious behaviour in a deeper way taking account the possibilities and causative factors for dissent and compliance. Bourdieu's field theory can treat religion as a field of forces, acting upon individuals and groups under historical and power relations. In this perspective individuals engage in the interpretation of the text and various practices. They also justify their practices given the circumstances in which they live. The subordinate like women, and youth often resort to resistance to dominant idea. Certain alternatives are developed by poor such as visiting Ajmer instead of Mecca. The sixth chapter examines the intersection of socio-economic, historic and cultural factors in the practice of religion among the Gujjars.

In the summary different strands are brought together and the conclusions are drawn interpreting the empirical facts in the background of the broad theoretical perspectives adopted for the study. The followers of Islam have been dynamic in

their cultural expressions and have adapted to different socio-cultural environments in the world. The age old anthropological debate has been on the aspects of on asking the basic questions of what really is 'true' Islam/ 'Ideal' Islam and how is it different from 'lived' Islam? How are we to study Muslims, people who follow Islam? Should religious texts be given primary importance than just the cultural context? The basic question is as an anthropologist what position can we take to better represent these people, or can we represent them objectively at all? The conclusion of this thesis articulates on some of these fundamental questions and also shows how the study of religion of Gujjars is an attempt to participate in the existing debates and discussions.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Research Methodology**

*Cultural analysis is not “an experimental science” in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Clifford Geertz 1973:35)*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides the theoretical framework adapted for this study which is important in the light of the discussion in the earlier chapter. There is no definite standard or a universally accepted definition of religion, or any particular theory or hypothesis that can guide anthropological research on religion. Hence, in this chapter the details of theoretical framework – theory of practice, model ‘of’ and ‘for’ religion, subject/subjectivity – and location of the study fieldwork and experiential learning and the limitations of the study are discussed. The fieldwork was carried out during 2009 and 2011 at different spells among different Gujjars leading a settled and semi-nomadic life.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

As there is no acceptable definition of religion, it is wise to use a definition that can guide as well as provide a methodology for collecting information and analysis<sup>1</sup>. For this purpose, Geertz’s (1973) definition of religion and his methodology has been considered relevant for the study. Also, keeping the recent trend in anthropological

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that the definition of religion given by Geertz has been criticized by many (See Asad 1983:238 and Morris 2006:10), I find it suitable for my research as it gives a direction for research.

theory in perspective, the present study considers the theory of practice proposed by Bourdieu (1977, 1993, 2005) and the critical theory that attempts to revisit the anthropological understanding of culture and subject (Ortner 2005).

According to Bourdieu, understanding the dynamics between people and groups of people is field theory. He argues that reality is a social concept and to exist is to exist socially, in relation to others. What is real is relational and everyone defines oneself and the world around him or her by marking the differences between observed phenomena. The modern western reality according to Bourdieu, has come into being through a process of differentiation into semi-autonomous and increasingly specialized spheres of action. He calls these spheres fields and says that power relations between and within these fields structure human behaviour. So, in order to understand how humans behave, it is important to understand the kind of power relations they are part of.

Bourdieu's definition of the field is,

“A field is a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field.” (2005:30)

In the case of Gujjars, we find their world structured around different field of forces, like being nomads, semi-nomads, sedentary in terms of their lifestyle; Sunni Muslims; buffalo herder (Dodhi) or sheep and goat rearer (Bakarwal) or sedentary agriculturalist (Desi) in terms of their economic activity. Another is 'field of humans': individual or agent occupies different positions as man, woman, child, mother, father, daughter, son, husband, wife, and so on. There is also the 'field of

religion': worshipper of *Allah*, follower of *Pir*; as religious specialists-*Moulvi* or *Pir*, a *Hajji*<sup>2</sup> and so on.

According to Bourdieu (1971), the positions the agents occupy in the field are determined by a number of things, firstly, there is the *habitus*, “a structuring which organizes practices and the perception of practices” for all agents. Bourdieu says every individual’s “*personal history, preferences and dispositions, placed in the context of the surrounding social reality*” form structures that to a certain extent predetermine that individual’s potential courses of action (82-83). The working of the *habitus*, among the Gujjars will be examined in the way different agents- man, woman, mother, father, husband, wife behave in their given circumstance, as pious adherents of Islam, or as casual believer, as faithful follower, obedient, disobedient etc.

Another concept that Bourdieu focuses on is *doxa* which is the second structuring principle in theory of field. According to him, *doxa* is

“ *the universe of tacit presuppositions that organize action within the field.*” (1977:164)

The *doxa* in other words, refers to the rules of the game/practice in the field for the agents. Like *habitus*, these rules have a limiting influence on the potential courses of action for the agents in the field. Agents in the same field will tend to share a set a rules, a common *doxa*, in so far as they agree that the particular ritual or practice is worth doing. In case of the Gujjars, there are rules, both social and religious, which each member will have to keep in mind and live accordingly. So when it comes to

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<sup>2</sup> Someone who has completed the religious pilgrimage to Mecca.

family obligations as the husband or wife, the *doxa* is that they are expected to fulfill their roles in terms of love, respect, and care for one another. The provider and protector role is for the husband, while the care giving and nurturing roles are for the women.

However, in Bourdieu's version of the field, agents do not always agree on the *doxa* or the rules of the game. According to him, agents occupy positions aimed at either conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces in a field. Agents who take positions aimed at transforming the power relations would change the rules of the game for their own benefit. He also highlights that in this struggle, players will use their power/*capital*, as he calls it, to impose the rules that favour them the most. Examining the concept of *doxa* among the Gujjars brings out questions about the various expressions of faith like-How should a good Muslim behave? How one can reach out to Allah better - man or woman, whom should be approached for connecting with Allah and so on. The agents in the process of getting answers to such questions may resort to various methods. In this aspect there are often disagreements resulting in conflict between various agents, man, woman, a Dodhi Gujjar, a Bakarwal or a Desi Gujjar, follower of *pir*, adherent of *dargah* piety etc.

Geertz defines religion in the following wherein he locates 'model of' and 'model for' of reality,

“ A system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” (1973:90)

In the *model of* and *model for* aspects of reality, the individuals and groups manipulate symbolic and non-symbolic structures to construct the world as it exists and the ideal world. The symbolic structures may be ideas such as *Allah*, *Jannat*, *Jahanum* and so on as well as physical objects like *dargah*, rites, *namaz* etc. All the mundane every day experiences in family, community, political and economic relationships constitute non-symbolic structures which are manipulated by the symbolic structure and vice versa. These create permanent moods and motivations in people and produce appropriate behaviour and psychological experiences. Looking at how people manipulate or try to live their everyday lives, in connection with the larger symbol structures, sometimes adhering to practices not sanctioned by the ideal religion, is what constitutes the '*model of*' aspect of religion. The way they attribute their every action individual or collective in the light of the symbol structures, is one of the primary focus of the research. This ultimately helps us to understand the lived realities of Islam, among a nomadic ethnic community.

Secondly, the *model for* aspect of reality also needs to be brought out in connection with the *model of* aspect discussed above. People as agents, as Muslims, act in the light of their understanding of the symbolic structures which ultimately tends to organize/impose<sup>3</sup> on their lives, which may be the ideal pattern of Islam, yet not all follow it. It can be viewed in the way Bourdieu refers to agents who take positions aimed at transforming the power relations that would change the rules of the practice/game, by bringing struggle/conflict.

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<sup>3</sup> Here Bourdieu's idea of 'transforming structure' connects very well.

*Model for* refers to a model under which physical relationships are organized. In the case of Gujjars their physical relationships in terms of their religious lives are centered on the basic teachings of Islam spread via several religious specialists. Also, the everyday activities (non-symbolic relationships) are tuned with that of the ideal norms of Islam so that their lives will be in congruence with the expectations of their religion. In this aspect there are often disagreements resulting in conflict between various agents, man, woman, a Dodhi Gujjar, a Bakarwal or a Desi Gujjar, follower of *pir*, adherent of *dargah* piety etc.

To consider the culture and subjectivity of Gujjars, there are no authentic historic records available; they only have orally passed information about their past as Hindus and their traditional migration on definite routes for cattle grazing. Gujjars' encounter with physical and social environment and their cattle form the link between their past and present life. The coordination of these components should be considered to understand the culture of Gujjars. The Gujjar is a generic term as will be discussed later that include ethnic groups inhabiting Jammu and Kashmir as well as Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and some other states. Gujjars consists of the Dodhi, Desi and Bakarwal, all with different economic lifestyle. However, there is an underlying cultural identity that distinguishes the Gujjars from the non-ethnic communities of different castes and religions. Even among the Desi and Bakarwal Gujjars there are differences along certain distinguishing cultural markers in addition to theological differences and differences in practices and beliefs. Thus, in this complex and varied social and cultural environment what Abu-Lughod writes seems to be appropriate. She writes,

“I challenge the very utility of the concept of culture, as shared meanings of a bounded commonly referred to as a culture.” (1986: xviii)

There is not one culture but cultures in a society<sup>4</sup>, there is a lack of consensus on culture. The problem is of conceptualization, method of abstraction and interpretation. Then, we will have to reconcile with the human culture (of a society)/cultures that is/are distinct from the animal behaviour. What alternatives do we have at the moment to deal with this theoretical issue? One possibility is to look at the recent developments of Critical Anthropology that is revisiting the conceptualization of culture itself, the basic foundation of anthropology. In this context, the perspective of the ‘subject’ has the potential to address the issue at hand meaningfully.

The concept of ‘subject’ has a long history in social theory. But its significance was recognized only recently in anthropology (Ortner 2005). It could be an individual, person, actor, agent etc., and is considered as an embedded concept in social structure, social organization and social relations. Of late, the agent is coming to the forefront in social analysis as a dynamic being instrumental in social process. The role of such agents was earlier subsumed under the group and the structures took the central place in the analysis of social and cultural formations and social organization.

Now, the individual being the agent is the one who carries cultural rules and norms of the society; who manipulates and brings about change in the society and its structures. He/she relates himself/herself with others and to the world outside, and the subjective perception of the objective world gives the structure of the world thus

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<sup>4</sup> I do not mean sub-cultures.

conceived. He/she reacts to the world as the world acts upon him/her and accordingly becomes self-analytic and reflective. Thus, subject is the form of an existing being and subjectivity is the content of that being. The subjectivity is the process in which the subject gets meaning of what it means to be a subject. Ortner says,

“I see subjectivity as the basis of “agency,” a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intensions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings”... “By subjectivity I will always mean a specifically cultural and historical consciousness”. (2005:38).

She writes about the construction of subjectivity based on a set of anxieties in the cultural context besides historical experiences and consciousness resulting from modern and post-modern developments. In this conceptualization the agent is reflecting, envisioning, imagining, expressing and constructing the reality of world in symbolic mode. Individuals agree, disagree, conceive and misconceive with others, and in their interactions emerge meanings, alternatives and reinforcements and reification. The multiplicity of culture and multidimensionality of culture can be captured and analyzed.

The controversy between ‘anthropology of Islam’ - ‘lived out’ and ‘ideal’ Islam, and ‘Islamic anthropology’ as pointed out earlier can have a solution if we consider the utility of the concepts of ‘field theory’ or ‘practice’ and ‘subject’. Individual as subject is the starting point of conceptualizing the culture of Gujjar, and in this case, religion. The practice of religion in the individual’s own understanding in his/her experience as man/woman, and performing roles of different social status; and also

as a Muslim in interaction with other religions, as well as interacting with the physical and social worlds will form the basis. It extends to interaction with others as a group, with similar and different experiences and understanding other groups in the course of which emerge different meanings out of the contest, disagreement and agreement on the common concerns. The ideals and the actual practices of the individuals and groups can be understood from this perspective as individuals are reflective beings as much as they are governed by culture.

From the above perspective, religion is studied objectively from the way it is lived out by Gujjars and as to how they understand the religious texts and tenets within their historical and contextual experiences. Alongside, religion can also be studied from the debates and interpretations offered by those who claim to be in conformity with the religious texts and their accusations on some others deviating from the ideals. In this context the field theory and subjectivity serve as frameworks for studying religion of Gujjars.

Geertz's definition of religion is considered as one of the most influential definitions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it has been used extensively in anthropological discourses as well as in other disciplines. Though it has been criticized <sup>5</sup> it at least gives a direction for understanding religion as a cultural system of symbols which can be of various kinds, as per the local context, and produce emotions. Geertz tried to

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<sup>5</sup> Asad criticizes this method saying that the analysis of religious symbols as vehicles of meanings alone without understanding the historical relations with non-religious symbols or articulations in and of social life is problematic. He finds it 'obscured' to understand religious symbols without trying to understand the form of life in which they are used (1993:128).

analyze religion through a two-staged operation, i.e., “analysis of meanings embodied in symbols which make up the religion proper, and, second, and also relating these systems to social-cultural and psychological processes.” (1973:125). After contributing so much in the field on questions of “What is Religion? What is to be included under this rubric? What are its borders? What are its marks? What, when you get down to it is ‘belief’, or ‘worship’, or ‘observance’, or ‘faith’?” Geertz (2005) agrees that when we study religion, it is talking about ‘meaning’<sup>6</sup>. However, it cannot be denied that without understanding few aspects of theology, philosophy, their psychology etc., a holistic understanding of their beliefs and practices cannot be achieved. As Geertz puts it ‘studying religion’ does not mean,

“..a single, bordered, learnable and teachable, sum-up-able thing. It is... a matter of sorting through various happenings variously encountered-large, public ones, like national elections or international migrations; small intimate ones like household feasts or Qur’an chants; merely incidental, parenthetical ones, like a broken funeral, a raided cockfight...all in an effort to sustain the sense that, more or less anyway and on balance, things make sense.” (2005: 13)

The absence of any definitive methodology to study religious beliefs and practices makes this task challenging. Geertz (1968) says that there are enormous amount of

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<sup>6</sup> Firstly, for him meaning is always ‘public’ and ‘social one’ rather than ‘private’ and ‘personal’. Secondly, it is “materially embodied, that it is...formed, conveyed, realized, emblemized, expressed, communicated, via ponderable, perceptible, construable signs; symbolical devices, like passage rites ...”. Also Thirdly, it is the problem of the conception of ‘limit’, or ‘ultimate’ or ‘existential’ problems of meanings: the notion that it is at the point at which all the cultural resources fail, the challenges of failure of cultural resources, the equipments of living etc., leaving a rather confused, ineluctable, irreversible pain etc., which comes into the picture. (2005:4-7).

ethnographic literature to demonstrate religion, but the theoretical framework which would enable us to provide an analytical account of it does not exist. He also laments on the idea in social science, particularly comparative religion that dwell on the notion that to have named something is to have understood it. According to him, naming things is necessary if the things named exist, but it is not much more than a prelude to analytic thought; and in the case of comparative religion it does not even give any more information than things sensed and insinuated (1968:23). He suggested that the first step toward a scientific comprehension of religious phenomena is to reduce their diversity by assimilating them to a limited number of general types. In other words, he wants the orientation to be towards denaturing our material, substituting cliché for description and assumption for analysis (*ibid*: 24). Geertz's work on aspects of symbolic and interpretive approach is of immense value for the study. For him a symbol means any object, act, event, quality or relation that serves as a vehicle for conception. The conception being the symbol's meaning. Geertz quotes,

“In religious belief and practice, a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being present as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life.” (1973:89-90).

Borrowing Geertz's idea, the main focus of this research will be to understand the meanings of what the Gujjars express in terms of their religious symbols.

Understanding the interrelationship of the models ‘of’<sup>7</sup> and ‘for’<sup>8</sup> reality which composes the cultural essence of religion indirectly leads to a better understanding of how the Islam is understood, lived and practiced in the everyday lives of the people.<sup>9</sup> This research has adapted the theoretical inputs of Geertz while not disregarding some of the ideas of prominent anthropologists of Islam like Asad (1986), Gellner (1981), Abu-Lughod (1986), Varisco (2005) and others are also considered as they have meaningfully dealt with the issues relating to Islam.

### **Location of the Study**

Jammu and Kashmir is a beautiful state of India, lying between 32° and 37° N and 73° and 80 ° E. The land is entirely mountainous except for a strip of level land along the Punjab border. Its mountains, valleys and lakes comprise some of the greatest sceneries of the world. The state can be divided physically into three areas-the upper, comprising the area drained by the river Indus and its tributaries; the middle, drained by Jhelum and Kishan Ganga rivers, and the lower consisting of the level strip along the southern border and its adjacent ranges of hills (Kaul 1963). Topographically the state rises at intermittent levels towards the mountains, whereas in the south, the

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<sup>7</sup> In [the models of], the manipulation of symbols structures is stressed so as to bring them parallel to the pre-established non symbolic systems, as when we grasp how dams work by developing a theory of hydraulics or constructing a flow chart. it is a model of reality (1973:93-94).

<sup>8</sup> In [the model for], the manipulation of the non symbolic system in terms of the relationship with the symbolic is stressed, as when we construct a dam according to the specifications implied in a hydraulic theory or the conclusions drawn from a flow chart (1973:93-94).

<sup>9</sup> Ortner (1978) has very fruitfully used the concepts models ‘of ‘and ‘for’ in her study of Sherpa religion.



Map 1: Jammu and Kashmir

lowest portion is the Jammu region which borders Punjab. The land is inclined upwards towards the mountain ranges (see Plate no. 1), whose peaks rise to 16,000 feet, which includes the Kashmir valley. Beyond these ranges the elevation increases further –the Pang Range with a height of 18, 000 feet where Ladakh and Baltistan are situated. The state of Jammu and Kashmir today is a conglomeration of peoples of different languages, cultures and religions. Muslims predominate the Kashmir valley, while there is a significant number of Hindus and Sikhs who have by tradition lived in Jammu region and the valley, and a small number of Buddhists live in Ladakh (Schofield 1997). The rich history of the state cannot be undermined as Kashmir, from the earliest times, was home to an important branch of Hindu religion-Saivism. Around the 14<sup>th</sup> century Islam arrived through Muslim diviners, and a large number of people were converted to Islam (Bamzai 1980:211). Various ethnic groups are settled in the state like Dogras, Gaddis, and Ladhakis each practicing their unique culture and tradition. Gujjars live alongside with these groups interacting with them at various levels.

As mentioned, the study is located in Jammu and Kashmir. Total population of Jammu and Kashmir as per 2011 Census is 12,541,302 and the region administered by India is made up of three parts: Jammu, in the south consists of plains and hills, which includes the Pir Panjal range; the Kashmir Valley in the north with an average altitude of 2000 meters between the Pir Panjal and the Great Himalayas; and the high mountain area of Ladakh, situated in the east and north of the Kashmir Valley (Sökefeld 2013:90). The Jammu region has been divided into 10 districts - Kathua, Jammu, Samba, Udhampur, Reasi, Rajouri, Punc, Doda, Ramban, Kishtwar, and the

Kashmir valley has another 10 districts, namely, Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama, Shupiyani, Badgam, Srinagar, Ganderbal, Bandipore, Baramulla, Kupwara. In Ladakh region there are only two districts viz., Kargil and Leh.

Kashmiris, Dards, Hanjis, Gujjars, Dogras, Chibhalis, Paharis, Rhotas, Gaddis and Sikhs constitute the major population groups in Jammu and Kashmir. These groups are found in different parts. For example, Kashmiris are mainly concentrated in the bottom of the Valley; Dards occupy the valley of Gurez; Hanjis are confined to the water bodies of Kashmir; Gujjars and Bakarwals live and oscillate within the Kandi areas of Jammu; Dogras occupy the outskirts of the Punjab plain, while Chibhalis and Paharis live between Chenab and Jhelum rivers. Moreover, there are numerous small ethnic groups like Rhotas, Gaddis and Sikhs with significant concentrations in isolated pockets of the State.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Jammu and Kashmir is extremely diverse in culture, language, religion, and ethnicity and is characterized more by differences than unity as a region.

The Gujjar, which include the Bakarwal are included under Scheduled Tribe (S.T) category in 1991. They account for 8.1 percent of population in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (2001 Census) is 7,63,806. Also they account for 69.1 percent of the total S.T population in Jammu and Kashmir which is 11,05,979. The Bakarwals, who are separately enumerated, are 60,724. At the district level, the highest concentration of the Gujjar is in Poonch and Rajauri, districts, followed by Anantnag, Udhampur and Doda districts. The Bakarwals have the highest concentration mostly in Leh,

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<sup>10</sup> <http://koausa.org/geography/ethnic.html> (accessed on June 2013). See also Kaul 1963, Warikoo and Som (2000), Husain (1998).

Anantnag and Baramula districts respectively.<sup>11</sup> The overall literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes is 37.5 per cent according to 2001 census. This is much lower than the national average of 47.1 per cent aggregate for all Scheduled Tribes. Male and female literacy rates (48.2 per cent and 25.5 per cent) are much below if compared to those recorded by all Schedule Tribes at the national level (59.2 per cent and 34.8 per cent).<sup>12</sup> From this data it is clear that more than 60 percent of the Gujjars are illiterate.

According to 2011 Census report, in Jammu and Kashmir the Scheduled Tribe population accounts for 11.9 per cent of the total population which is 14, 93, 299<sup>13</sup>. The actual figures on the individual population of the different Scheduled Tribe communities of the state are not yet available. It is important to note that Census 2011 have been unaccepted by most of the Gujjars and Bakarwals stating that they were not adequately covered within the census. As a result there has been displeasure over the entire issue and also there is suggestion by few organizations for conducting “special census” for them<sup>14</sup>. In Jammu and Kashmir there are five major sub-tribes of Gujjars. They are: (1) Banihara or Dodhi Gujjars who inhabit mainly the areas of Jammu, Udhampur, Kathua and Doda districts. The main occupation of this sub-tribe

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<sup>11</sup>[http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables\\_Published/SCST/dh\\_st\\_jk.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_jk.pdf) (accessed on July 2013)

<sup>12</sup>[http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables\\_Published/SCST/dh\\_st\\_jk.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_jk.pdf)(accessed on July 2013)

<sup>13</sup><http://tribal.nic.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201306110208002203443DemographicStatusofScheduledTribePopulationofIndia.pdf> (accessed on august 2014)

<sup>14</sup><http://www.thehindu.com/news/states/other-states/article2235769.ece> (accessed on June 2012)

is selling milk and milk products; (2) Bakarwal Gujjars inhabit almost every district of the state in substantial numbers. However, they are mostly found in Kalakote, Riasi, Nowshaira, Bandi-Pura, Shopian, Kulgam, Pahlgam, Tral and Uri areas; (3) Alahiwal Gujjars, who are migrants from the frontier province of Pakistan are mostly nomads; (4) Kanhari Gujjars are also migrants from Swat and Hazara areas of Pakistan and they are mostly found in KalaKote of Rajouri district; (5) Semi-nomadic Gujjars.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the Gujjars who led sedentary lives are called Desi Gujjar while those who are nomadic are called Khanabadosh Gujjar and Khanabadosh Bakarwal.

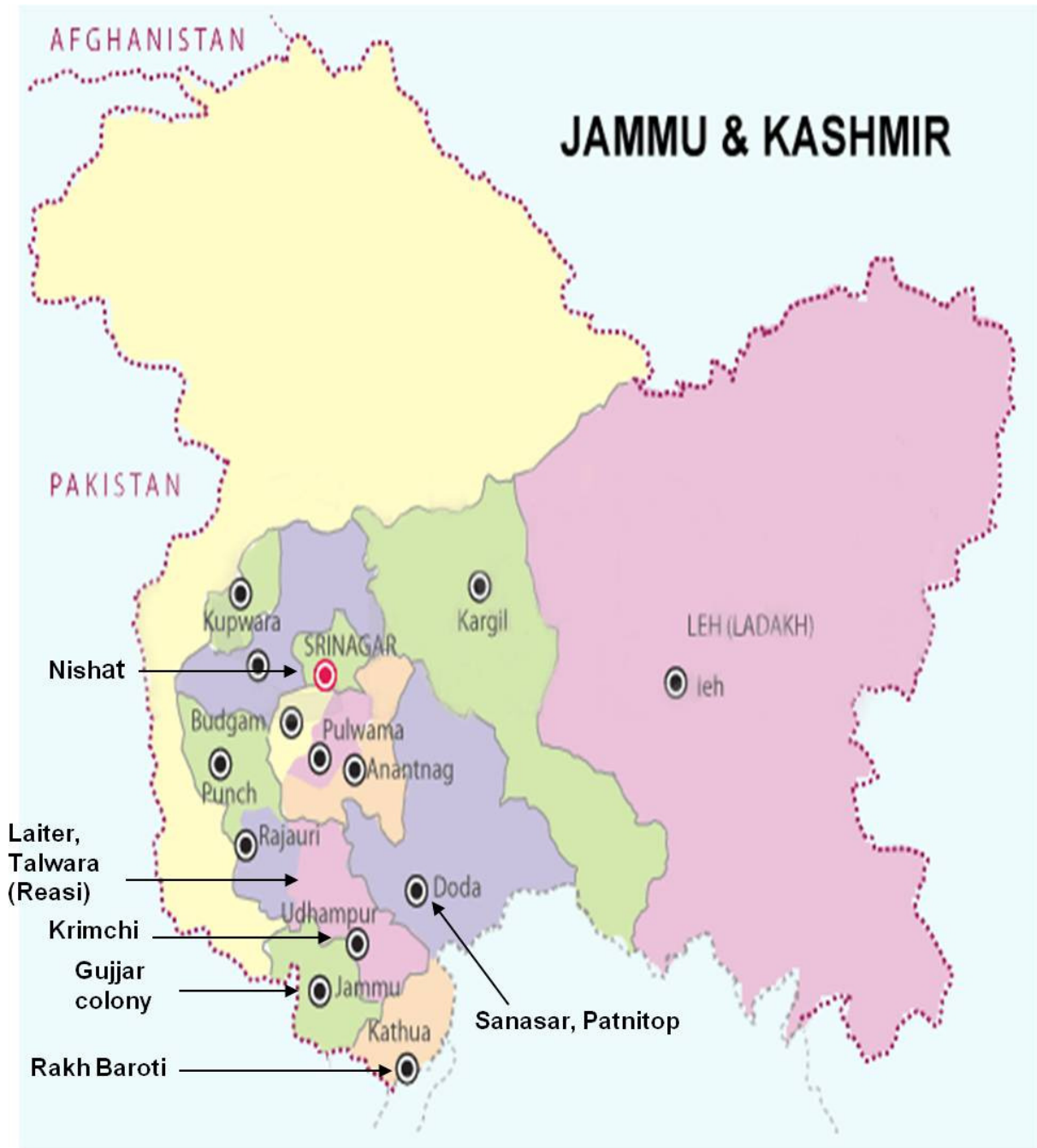
The present study concentrates on the Banihara/Dodhi Gujjars, Desi and Bakarwal Gujjars from different parts of the state. The field work for this study has been carried out among the settled, semi-nomadic and nomadic Gujjars. The Gujjars interact with different communities and religious groups they encounter in their day today lives. Their lifestyle allows them to move seasonally from place to place, have economic relations with these different communities they meet. More details of these communities are presented in the following chapter.

### **Fieldwork Timeline**

The fieldwork was carried out among the Dodi Gujjars, Desi and Bakarwal Gujjars during 2009-2011 in three spells. Since Gujjars are geographically distributed throughout Jammu and Kashmir, I could not confine myself to a particular location for a long duration and instead moved to different locations. Also, a local NGO and

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<sup>15</sup> <http://jktribals.page.tl/> (accessed on July 2013)



Map 2: Fieldwork locations in Jammu and Kashmir

informants helped me identify the Gujjars in different parts of the state enabling me to experience the life of a wide variety of Gujjars. The variety within the Gujjar conglomeration include inter and intra-regional variations in terms of Gojri usages; dress and lifestyle patterns; food habits and cattle rearing practices. Though there are differences among the Gujjars, there are commonalities in many ways which gives them a common identity and that is often asserted despite the differences. The fieldwork started with a pilot study in Sanasar valley (See Plate no. 2) in May 2009 for a month, and the regular field work was carried out in the same area for more than three months in Sanasar and Patnitop from August through October 2009.

In November 2009, I joined a group of nomadic Bakarwal families (with the help of an NGO) who were shifting from one of their location in Jammu to Laiter (Riyasi Tehsil) and stayed with a family for a month. I moved to Jammu where field work was carried out among the Gujjars in the Jammu Gujjar colony (Sunjuwan) and also in Vijaypur town (in a settlement called Rakh Baroti) from March through June 2010. I revisited Sanasar for further data collection in the middle of June 2010 and later visited the Gujjar settlement in Riyasi district in the same month. At this time, I also interacted with Desi Gujjars, the sedentary Gujjars in Riyasi, Jammu and Udhampur districts. I resumed my fieldwork in Rakh Baroti settlement among Dodhi Gujjars from July till October 2010. The fieldwork among the Gujjars at Rakh baroti was resumed from March through May 2011, which was followed with visiting a Bakarwal family in Srinagar (Nishat) who was on their way from Jindral *tehsil* of Jammu to Pahalgam region for their summer migration.

## Field work in Sanasar and Patnitop area

The first location for the fieldwork (pilot study) was Sanasar valley of Jammu in May 2009. Sanasar is an important tourist destination in Jammu and Kashmir. It is a lush green hill station located at a height of 2079 metres above sea level. Adjacent to it is the scenic Patnitop, a popular hill resort located at a height of 2,024 meters and is a tourist destination for summers<sup>16</sup>. Patnitop and Sanasar are located 105 kilometres from Jammu on the Jammu-Srinagar Highway (NH1A). These places are known for huge *deodhar* trees, waterfalls, picnic spots and the Nag temple. The common activities here during the peak summer season i.e., between May and July are horse riding, camping, trekking, golfing, paragliding etc. From November to January, both places witness harsh winters with heavy snow. Come summer, beginning with the *baisakh mahina* (month of April), the Gujjars arrive in these places to stay till the end of September (beginning of winter months). They come from different parts of the plains of Jammu in big trucks with their buffaloes; and some on foot, trekking for about two or three weeks to reach this place and settle for about six months. On arrival, they clean up their mud houses with thatched roofs which were left unused the whole winter months. The Gujjars who come here are called the Laddia Gujjars. They profess historical roots from the Ladda<sup>17</sup> of the upper ranges indicating their ancestors' transhumant nature covering nearly 200-300 kilometres in each trip. Earlier, the seasonal migration was undertaken together as a

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<sup>16</sup> Kishore and Sharma ( 2003:191-193)

<sup>17</sup> In the lower ranges of the Himalayas which is also popularly inhabited by the Gaddis, a nomadic group, who are mostly Hindus. (Jerath 1995:13). See also Kohli (2002: 24)

community but things have changed today. Families split temporarily during migration as half of the members migrate to the summer homes while the rest stay on in the winter location. People would then reunite with their relatives and establish (or re-establish) social networks connecting their paternal or maternal relatives.

They stay in this high altitude and pursue buffalo herding and cattle grazing ( See Plate 3). They often remark that they like to be here as there is enough fodder for their cattle and the heat is less than the plains, which makes them calmer. However, in winter they return to plains. They live alongside the Hindu Dogras who are the *zamindars* (landowners), the Gaddis as well as the Bakarwals. Their settlement pattern in the mountains during the summer is very different from their winter location. It is quite similar in almost all the places where the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars reside in the mountains. Here in the Sanasar and Patnitop areas they reside in the many *dhoks* (temporary shelters) scattered far apart from one another and in some cases in the few huts clustered together. These are generally arranged in clusters of 2-3 *dhoks* together while most of the *dhoks* stand about one or two kilometers apart from the rest.

The walls of the house made of mud and stones, has a thatched hay roof above and inside there is generally one room tenement. At one corner is the fireplace along with the utensil rack on the wall. Steel cups, saucers, pans and pots are kept neatly arranged. The family sits around the fire relishing *lipton chai* (locally made milk tea) with hot *rotis* or *fulka* (small round wheat bread). There are a few wooden *charpoys* (beds) with some old woolen blankets on top and there are also a few storing boxes to keep their clothes and other assets. However, the rest of the hut is generally

unpleasant as the smell of buffalo dung and urine fills the house along with the smoke from the firewood. Generally, the *dhoks* are door less and they even sleep outside the houses without any fear. I visited around 40 *dhoks*, which were miles apart from each other. Each *dhok* is occupied by a family unit called *dera*. In the case of one of my informants Hajji Mohammad, his *dera* consisted of a cluster of three *deras* which were occupied by his sons and their family members.

On my second visit in 2010, I found many of the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars in Sanasar and Patnitop areas cultivating cash crops like potatoes and corn. It was part of a government initiative for their better sustenance. In the first pilot trip in 2009 to that region, these activities were not so extensive. There were also a couple of ration shops which sold basic food stuff like rice, pulses, sugar, salt and other eatables. The Gujjars procured items like clothing and other necessities from the nearby towns. As mentioned before, their major source of income was the sale of buffalo milk in the nearby towns like Kud, Badode and even in Udampur which is quite far. Either the man or woman in the family will take the milk in large cans at dawn in the locally available transport, like a small bus service, locally called *metadore* and return by dusk. This is an everyday affair and a major portion of their milk is sold to sweet shops in Kud that sell *patista*, a popular sweet meat. They also sell milk products like *koya* which is prepared by boiling large quantities of milk for hours till the milk is reduced to solid paste. This is then sold to sweet shops at a good price, which is also used to prepare sweets.

As Sanasar and Patnitop areas attract many tourists every year during summers, many Gujjars have taken up other alternative occupations like providing horse riding

services, tourist guides etc alongside their traditional occupation. Gujjars own good horses, which they use for giving rides to the tourists by charging a few hundred rupees for a ride. Their competitors are local people like the Dogras and the Gaddis who also are into such profession. They maintain a good relationship especially when it comes to appreciation of culture and such things. Gujjar girls have a good rapport with Dogra girls and they spend time learning and knowing themselves better. They can understand each other's language, songs and other stories due to the time they spend together as neighbours. Gujjar girls in the Sanasar valley know how to sing in Dogri along with Hindi and Gojri songs. Gujjar men also maintain good rapport with the other men folk like the Gaddi and Dogra neighbours in the region and participate in the social and cultural functions like marriage, death and even participate in settling disputes in their community. They however do not accept marriage alliances from outside their community. The local school is a good platform that brings the Gujjars and other communities together and strengthen their relationship despite the occasional inter community problems they encounter due to fear and suspicion.

The Gujjars often face problems regarding territorial grazing lands with the Bakarwals and the Dogras. Their conflicts are over the encroachment on the grazing lands by their cattle. The Gujjars in Sanasar pay the local *zamindars* some amount for letting their cattle graze in their fields during the summer. This is an ongoing tradition for generations as they share a close relationship with the local *zamindars*. Also they often face problems with militants, who often trouble them, when they cross the jungles with the cattle. They often complain of being beaten by them, who

steal their sheep and goats too. Basic amenities like medical facilities are lacking and though there are government run mobile schools, the Gujjars' response towards their children's education is poor<sup>18</sup>. Few Gujjar children attend the local schools along with the local children belonging to the Dogra or other communities.<sup>19</sup> There are many social-cultural factors, which has resulted in such an attitude towards education. Girls stop attending the school after a certain age as they have more work at home- household chores as well as taking care of the buffaloes, which the parents feel it is important that they learn. Also, as they become teenagers their parents find suitable partners for them so that they can settle early in life. Hence, schooling is not considered to be an important aspect in their lives. The Gujjars inhabiting Sanasar valley enjoy a better climate during summers compared to those residing in the plains of Jammu (See Plate no.3). They are able to take better care of their buffaloes both in terms of availability of fodder and grazing land than those residing in the plains.

### **Field Work in Rakh Baroti settlement**

The second venue for my fieldwork was in the plains of Jammu, in Vijaypur town where there are about 200 Gujjar *deras*. The town is about 30 kilometres from

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<sup>18</sup>Though the government has started an initiative of providing free meals for school children, there is no such thing in place when it comes to the schools these children attend.

<sup>19</sup> An NGO called the 'Millennium Relief and Development Services' was trying to provide the children basic education by opening free tuition centers that cater to children of different levels in the locality. However, the response was still poor. There are also other government initiated schools that the children attend but in small numbers.

Jammu city under the administrative jurisdiction of Samba district. This place gave me a glimpse of Gujjar sedentary life that differs greatly from the lush mountain green hills of Sanasar and Patinitop. The dry and hot weather was a challenge for me as the rise in temperature caused severe discomfort to do fieldwork. The settlement has less vegetation; and the houses are cramped in close proximity with each other. The settlement is known locally as Rakh Baroti. They refer to their settlement as *gaon* also, meaning ‘village’ in Hindi, which also shows the similarity in their language usage with the local population like the Hindi speaking Dogras, Sikhs etc.

Rakh Baroti is a Dodhi Gujjar village. The people here are also semi- nomadic buffalo herders (See Plate 5 and Plate 6). But they still like to call themselves Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars not in the sense of being a wanderer (which is the original meaning) but of not being able to own land and settle down properly and their dependence on their cattle for their whole livelihood. They often argued that they were the ones who needed proper attention as they lagged behind the rest of the Gujjars economically, politically and educationally. They considered the other Gujjars like the Desi Gujjars, to be better off in terms of overall development. One of the elderly Khanabadosh Gujjar comments,

*“Koi Gujjar zamindar bhi hein aur paralikha hein. Unke rehen aashen ham se aalak hein. Unko desi Gujjar bolte hein. Jo Gujjar garib hein aur taklif mein hein voh humlok hein, khanabadosh Gujjar, aur ham logo ke pass sirf hamara maize hi hein aur kuch nahi.”*

(Some Gujjars are owners of land and are educated. Their lifestyle is quite different from ours. They are called Desi Gujjars. Those Gujjars who are very poor in lifestyle are us, the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars, who have buffaloes and nothing else)

In fact, the Rakh Baroti is a temporary settlement that the state government granted to the Gujjars of Abdullah Basti during the Kargil war of 1999 who were forcefully displaced as this village located in Ramgarh district is in the Indo-Pak border. This settlement is in existence since 14 years. The land is barren with few trees, without any grazing lands and proper water supply. The village has a representative in the local *panchayat*<sup>20</sup> locally called *penj*. When I visited the village in June 2010, nearly half of the households in the settlement had migrated to their summer homes in various parts of the state, mainly in Baderwah and Sanasar areas. For two generations Gujjars have been undertaking seasonal migration to nearby states like Haryana and other regions in Kashmir like Baderwah, Kazikund, Kukanag, Patnitop (Sanasar) etc., and some continue to do it even today. Those who stay back in the settlement have a tough time managing with very little fodder and water for themselves as well as their cattle. Many of them move temporarily to nearby locations of about 5-10 kilometers with their cattle and lodge in the fields of local Hindu *zamindars* to avail better fodder for their cattle. These *zamindars* generally rent out their land to the Gujjars during the summer months for a small amount and

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<sup>20</sup> It is the most important position of political standing among the Gujjars. Nambardar Shamujddin, takes the responsibility of the society and tries to solve their problems. Today however the position of the *nambardar* is not as high as it was earlier. Nowadays, more people are going to the courts to get their problems addressed. (Sashi 1994:32)

the *zamindar* also buy manure from the Gujjar at cheaper rates. They simply enter into reciprocal or symbiotic relation without any payment. People move back to the village by the end of July or early August when the monsoon starts as fodder and water will be available by that time.

In Rakh Baroti I faced hindrances as the elders of the settlement did not allow me to rent a house as I was an unmarried girl and was alone. Instead they advised me to arrive in their settlement in the morning, complete my interactions with the people, and then depart before sunset. This reveals their attitude towards women or girls who could come under the male gaze and are susceptible for harm within the community as well as outside. In this community the normative behavior of unmarried women requires not generally venture out alone even to sell milk or go to the market. However young girls rebel by venture out to sell milk and run errands alone, amidst the taunts and cautions from the elders. Cases of elopement, which are not uncommon form of marriage in the present times, display the changing attitude of younger generation. In such cases, women or girls willingly run away from their parents place, defying traditional authority and male domination.

Their clothing is another important factor for them as a Muslim and a Gujjar. When I initially sported with jeans and a long shirt, the elderly women and girls were taken aback, and advised me to wear only *salwar* (long shirt) and *pyjama* (lower loose pant), which for them is the ideal clothing. They expected me to continue with it as long as I visited them, to avoid any gaze as well as to be “correctly” dressed in their culture. In a society where marriages for girls are usually arranged at an early age, and women already mothers by early 20s, I being unmarried was something they

could not understand and found problematic. Many would ask me when I will get married and why I am not married already? They even joked that I could find myself a groom here among them, which meant that their attitude towards me was warming up and also revealed their worldview regarding gender etiquette, responsibilities and expectation.

In summer, the temperature could go up to 45<sup>0</sup> C in Jammu during mid April-August making lives even more difficult. They complained several health problems and negligence of the government official in providing basic amenities and shared the difficulties in sustaining with their meager incomes. Since many of them do not migrate like they did before, they often remember wistfully the cool mountainous terrains that they used to migrate earlier. An elderly Gujjar woman from Rakh Baroti says,

*“Kitne hara aur accha hein Baderwah ke Pahare mein bata nahi sakte. Oof bahut thand aur mein jab chota tha mere poora parivar jate the udhar. Mere ami aur abu aur mere pai aur ben bhi. Toubah! Aaj ham idhar hein, itne garmi mein aur ham Baderwah nahi jate aab. Bahut mushkil hein.”*

(How lush and green the mountains of Baderwah was when I was young and my family-my parents and siblings, used to enjoy our time there. Alas! Today we are here in this dry, hot place unable to move out because of many restraints)

They often reminisce about their past when they used to migrate extensively on foot, resting on the way, cooking food and in some cases the pregnant women even gave birth en route the seasonal migration. In last few years, they hired trucks to carry the buffaloes to their destination. Travelling on foot which was a tradition is slowly declining due to various hindrances. They blame the congestion in the road due to

heavy traffic, dislike ill health of buffaloes, and even curse their physical inability (See Plate no.8). Many of them remarked that they are not as strong as they used to be. Yesteryears are often retold and remembered alongside the struggles they face today as Khanabadosh Gujjars. For them, the past was a period of self sufficiency as nomads with their cattle whereas today their lives are full of struggles, as their nomadic tradition is no longer economical but rather a burdensome activity. But they still want to maintain these ways because they believe that if they stop these activities, they will no longer be who they are-people with cattle and in that way their identity will be lost.

The Gujjars of this settlement claim that they are originally from Bhaderwah, which is the area towards Doda and Kishtwar district that reach towards Himachal and look forth to Punjab. This Gujjars are also known as Bhaderwahi Gujjars and differ slightly from other Gujjars in the dress and dialect. Most of them are third generation Gujjars who do no longer undertake the strenuous seasonal migration like their grandparents or parents. Almost all of them have stopped going to Bhaderwah nowadays due to various inconveniences, similar to those discussed earlier. Besides, there is the availability of better opportunities due to staying near a town. Though there is access to shops and health care just in one or two kilometers away from the village, there seem to be a certain inhibition in mingling with the local populations as they always feel marginalized and scorned by the non-Gujjars as they are considered 'lowly' and 'backward' and 'dirty', and doing menial jobs like selling of milk and taking care of the buffaloes.

### **Fieldwork among Desi Gujjars in Jammu area**

During my stay in Jammu, I also interacted with the Desi Gujjars, whose houses or localities in Jammu areas are known as Gujjar colony, Sunjuwan, Channi Himmat, Mirali, Riyasi and so on. They completely stopped the migrating life and settled to sedentary lifestyle with land and property and have almost no links with nomadic lifestyle in the present times. Some of the families neither remembered any of places where their ancestors lived or used to migrate, nor appreciated their past tradition of nomadic life as they had stopped undertaking the seasonal movement over the last two or three generations. They are also known as *zaminidari* Gujjars, as they practice agriculture as their main source of livelihood and also keep few buffaloes to meet their basic needs of milk and other milk products. I also conducted my fieldwork in the Gujjar colony of Jammu area near Sunjuwan military station, where about 80-100 Gujjar families lived. Adding to that, I travelled occasionally to Riyasi district which is the area surrounded by the Shivalik ranges in sub-Himalayan terrain that had many Desi Gujjars families inhabiting near the banks of river Chenab. I also visited and interacted with Dodhi Gujjars in Udhampur district as well as in Satwari and Chinnaur farm, which are near Jammu town.

### **Fieldwork among the Bakarwal**

Bakarwals claim to be different from the other Gujjars to some extent in lifestyle and habits. One of the informants, an elderly Bakarwal Lala Abdul Rouf, said,

*“Gujjar Bakarwal milte hein magar hamare biradari hein jo alaag hein, hamare rehen sahen kuch aur hein...voh jo dodhi khanabadosh Gujjar hein,*

*haam unko kehte hein pahari gujjar, unka rehen sahen kafi ganda hein...vahi bhes palte te hein aur rehetete hein.”*

(There are close similarities between Gujjar and Bakarwal but in terms of biradari, we are different. Our lifestyle is different...those who are semi-nomadic buffalo herders, we call them as forest Gujjar, their lifestyle is quite dirty...they domesticate their buffaloes and live with them)

According to my observation of the two groups, they all share similar physical features, and there is no much difference in the way they dress, but there is difference in the way they speak Gojri and their general perception about the world greatly differs as a group. The Bakarwals consider themselves as one of the most neglected communities of the state in terms of their overall development. A large chunk of the Bakarwals (according to them about 40 percent) is still Khanabadosh and carries on the tradition of *radari* (physical movement of their household with their cattle) every year.

Lala Abdul Rouf is the head of the *kafila*<sup>21</sup>. According to them, the *kafila* consists of two or three *deras* moving together for their seasonal migration. In case of Abdul Rouf's *kafila*, it consists of his family-wife and sons and daughters-in-law, and his grandchildren, as well as his *chachu*'s (father's brother) family. Lala Abdul Rouf calls himself an *Allialwal* Bakarwal. They claim to have come from the Alhwal region of Pakistan. I also visited a Bakarwal *dera* in Laiter, (a place in Riyasi Tehsil, under Riyasi District). They call themselves the *Kunhari* Bakarwals. They claim to have come from the Kunhar region of Pakistan. The family I was acquainted with was that of Rafiq. Rafiq's father is the head of the *biradari*. During my visit to their

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<sup>21</sup> The word *Kafila* most commonly means Caravans, generally camels carrying families and merchandise. See Bhattacharya (1995:50).

camp, they were preparing to migrate back to their winter home in Jammu area and so were packing up their camp, utensils and clothes on the backs of their donkeys and horses. Some women migrated first on foot, while some hired vehicles along with the household stuff, while men followed them later with the herd of sheep and goats. During their summer migration, I visited them in their temporary camp near the famous Nishat Bagh (garden) area in Srinagar. They were on their way to Sonamarg. Even as recent as May 2013 they informed me that they were in Nishat bagh (Srinagar) preparing to move to Sonamarg. They narrated many of their struggles as they undertook their seasonal *radari*. Not all Bakarwals go to the same location, and they have their own routes, which they have been using for many generations. Abdul further says,

*“hamare buzoorgo ne yei route diya tha...hamare jaga allotmein hein garmi ka aur sardi ka bhi, koi doosra Bakarwal hamare allotment mein nahi jaye ga...jaha hamare buzoorgo ne banaye hein uuhsi route mein ham lete hein.”*

(Our forefathers gave us this route, we have our own allotments for our winter location; other Bakarwals cannot come to our allotments, the routes our forefathers took, we take the same route only)

This shows the importance they give to these traditions, which help keeping the *radari* alive. They have many memories regarding their journeys, some of which are often so difficult to forget. They reminisce about the places that were not so crowded where they rested for a day or two, with their entire family and cattle, with an open moonlight sky, the cool breeze and echoes of birdsongs in the trees. One of the elderly Bakarwal remembers,

*“ pehle haam char char panch panch dera ek acchi jaga meidan dekhte the, Laddadar se Udampur se upar . Waha das din bhi rehte the Bahut sare ghas*

*the maal ke liye, pani bhi the ziada, zamine bahut nahi the, aur abadi bhi kaam the.”*

(In the past, three to four households together would look for a nice spot during migration, beyond Laddadar and Udampur, where we used to spend even up to ten days. There were plenty of grass for the cattle, water was available in plenty, land was not so much and people were less)

However, today they lament that they cannot spend even a night on the way in those spaces, as the population has increased and there is less fodder for their cattle. People have occupied more land for building houses, cultivating of food and cash crops like wheat, rice and maize. There are many other issues regarding their seasonal movements. Abdul Rouf sadly reveals his concern saying,

*“ Hum logo ko raaste mein gali dete hein, mar pit karte hein, hamara maal<sup>22</sup> chori karte hein. Ye aisi zabardasti kai log karte hein hamare saat. Pehle zamane mein aman ka zamana tha. Us vakat log kam tha..Bakarwalon ke saat bahut ziakti hote hein aaj.”*

(We are often scolded on the way, they fight with us, our cattle are stolen. People forcefully do all this to us. In the past, there was peace. There were less people then. Lot of injustice happens to us Bakarwals)

Local people like the Kashmiris or the Dogras often steal their cattle. They also face the problems of land grazing and exploitation by the local population. One Barkarwal said,

*“Ye log kheti bari karte hein, kai log jo janglat mein rehte hein, jo janglat vale hein voh log gaer allotment lege aapni zamine banayi hein. Woh patwari ke saat rishwat dekar unhone apni apni zamine banayi hein. Sarkar ke taraf se kuch allotment nahi hein. Patwari hota hein maal wazir. Unke se ye zameen lete hein. Ase ye log zameen lekar ye hamara raaste bandhkiye hein. Hamare baer bakre chori bhi hote hein, kai dafa hamare se larayi hote hein.”*

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<sup>22</sup> The word *maal* in Hindi refers to wealth. The Dodhi Gujjars and Bakarwals refer to their cattle as *maal*, which also shows that their cattle is their wealth.

(These are people who cultivate, most of them live in the forest, and they have allotted land illegally and occupied it. They have bribed the local moneylenders and occupied the lands, there is no such allotment from the government. The Patwaris are local moneylenders. From them they take the land. After occupying the land they block our paths, many times our sheep and goats are stolen on the way, many times, they have fought with us)

Such are the numerous challenges that they narrate about their lives today.

### **The Experiences of Ethnographic fieldwork**

Anthropological explorations in the footsteps of Malinowski have driven scholars towards the idea of prolonged fieldwork and learning from the people themselves. However, the Malinowskian way of a long-term stay in a particular community in a closed cultural enclosure, unaffected by the outside world is not feasible today. Cultures have always been porous, and dynamic and so changes are obvious. With time, the needs and aspirations of people have changed, which have brought many problems and issues to be tackled while conducting fieldwork. Even though doing research has become better with various technologies available like digital cameras, mobile phones and recorders along with better transport facilities, there are still challenges that come with the changing times. Contemporary issues also such as security, regionalism, identity, caste, language, and even race can hinder the collection of data. Gender biases, local political or economic situations and other issues also come. Also, most of the contemporary ethnographic writings are predetermined with certain theoretical interests that guide the researchers to seek the kind of information that they wish to record (Beattie 1964:19). This makes the researcher go in one particular direction, based on the theoretical interest, subsequently limiting the flexibility.

It is an amazing journey to work with these unique pastoral nomadic communities who are ardent Muslims for my research. Obtaining a first-hand account of the Gujjars gave me an opportunity to examine what Geertz (in the opening quote) highlights about anthropological exploration, as cultural analysis that helps understanding people and their everyday meanings. I could visit different locations in Jammu and Kashmir where the Gujjars inhabit during my 14 months long fieldwork. Having a sedentary socio-cultural upbringing and coming to this part of the country where people move seasonally for their survival is an entirely new experience. For them also it is a strange experience with me as they had no clue about my community and where I come from even after showing the map of India. There were a few exceptions who claimed to have watched performances of dances and songs of some communities from the Northeast on the television sets, or some who had heard from their relatives who are in the Army and stationed in the Northeastern states. Thus, in a country as large as this where there are thousands of communities, one is hardly familiar with the other and people have various perceptions about communities other than their own.

Even though born and brought up in the hills, I had not come across a community that lived in such close communion with nature and cattle which piqued my interest in them. Even my identity as an Indian amazed them. They often took me for a Nepali, Ladhaki or Chinese, which also threw some light on their worldview. When I told them that I am a Naga, they could not help but ask where my land is, whether I had come with someone from there to Jammu and if I had been travelling all alone etc. The idea that a woman could travel alone and live in an unknown place was

difficult for them to digest as it was alien to what they upheld regarding women and their freedom. For them, the world outside is not a safe place to venture into, especially for girls. Being a closed community dependent on one another for survival they maintained a distinct social and cultural identity wherever they went and were not always very open to outsiders, as they constantly felt threatened. However, once they became comfortable with a stranger, they were very hospitable. They treated the guests to quality *lipton chai* (milk tea) and *roti* (flat wheat bread), and would sit for hours continuously with interest to answer the questions that the ethnographer poses. They were equally interested in knowing about the outside world. They were eager to share the little they had which was an important gesture of acceptance towards their guest. At the end of my stay, they presented me with a beautiful decorated woolen floor mat called *tharo*, woven out of the sheep wool as their parting gift. I cannot forget such countless gestures of love and welcoming by sharing food as well as their lives. The Desi Gujjar families in Reasi district were also similar in their friendliness and acceptance. When I was about to leave that place finally, the women folk in my host family, gave me a parting gift of a few hundred rupees, which was also a gesture of love and acceptance, as they now considered me as one of their daughters.

They were fascinated by this outsider's curiosity, who sat with them, shared meals with them and was inquisitive of their culture and tradition. Most of them would ask, "*kyu aye aur kya kare hamare baremein lekh kaar?*"(Why have you come and what will you do with all our stories?) And "*Ke faida ho hamko in vaste?*"(How is it going to benefit us?) This part was tough to answer. This made me question myself

on the authority that leads us to do fieldwork. The question of -who are we to write and ask these people about them? And what right do we have to ask them to tell us about their lives? The whole idea of an emotional engagement with the field and the informants has been a *rites de passage* for many anthropologists, but the disciplinary neglect of such a crucial aspect of human condition is remarkable (Lindholm 2007: 30). Doing fieldwork in another community was a huge challenge, with the biases one tend to carry within, despite all the ethnographic anthropological training and learning one acquires in one's academic life. Our socialization processes as well as the various facets of life mould our worldview, which we cannot just erase in those few liminal phases of fieldwork, which so many anthropologists so often glorify themselves as "going native" or becoming native. Even after interacting and trying to 'become' like them so as to understand them better, I still felt inadequately equipped to write about them. I conclude that the idea of an *emic* (inside) perspective however hard it is to gain from the *etic* (outside) is in reality inadequate to represent the way of life of the people whose lives one is studying<sup>23</sup>. One can never become an insider nor can one fully understand their hearts and way of life.

There were also moments of intense emotion, like when people narrated their struggles in life, their past and having to witness the state in which some of them lived. Although in the academic discipline of anthropology, emotion is something which cannot be avoided, the discipline itself shunned popularizing it as the whole idea of emotion came in the way of 'scientifically observing' the situation. Also in

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<sup>23</sup> The emic and etic perspective is from Kenneth Pike's linguistic understanding on phonemic and phonetic respectively (Pike 1954:8).

the context of the West, emotion arises in the core of the individual, and it falls within the discipline of psychology and physiology and not within the domains of anthropology, which is concerned with culture and symbolic relationships (Lindholm 2007: 31). Emotionally engaging with the studied community is an act, which cannot be avoided and it does help in connecting with the people better. Emotions too are cultural constructions and by understanding them we can understand the people better; especially when it comes to understanding religious beliefs and practices, an aspect which cannot be overlooked. As Lindholm put it rightly saying,

“the view of the emotions as active elements motivating an individual’s relationship with culture makes better sense of ethnographic data than does the notion that emotions are really a form of cognition, wholly socially and linguistically constituted” (*ibid*: 41).

All that can be done is to represent them as they talk, share, and think about themselves, objectively. This is expected in academics, and especially in anthropology, which claims fieldwork to be its hallmark. Thus, if it has to continue as the hallmark of anthropology, despite being burrowed by other disciplines, it has to redefine itself, to assert its uniqueness.

Fieldwork requires one to establish a rapport in various ways. I would often baby sit as the mothers left to fetch water in the nearby stream; or help in cooking and cleaning the vessels. They offered me whatever they ate, which was a pleasure for a new comer writing about their lives. Food was an important part of the course of fieldwork, which gave me a good opportunity for establishing rapport. During meals and tea sessions they have many discussions about their lives and the way they see

things around them. In addition to being a woman, my faith was another topic, which really interested them.

Being a Christian (*Isayi* in their words), they would often try to engage in a discussions on theology, suggesting that their belief is the best and that I should consider converting into Islam. Some of them were suspicious of my motive too. In spite of verifying several times about the purpose of my visit there, some thought I was from government agencies and some even thought I was trying to introduce my religion among them. Very often, those who became friendly with me and with whom I shared a good rapport, asked me to ‘convert’ into Islam by reading the *Kalimah* and as an elder told me “become a Muslim and gain an entrance into Paradise.” It was not hard to understand their stories from the Qur’an, which they shared so enthusiastically, as the stories of creation and of the prophets were similar to the stories of the Old Testament (*Torah*) though the way it was narrated was different in the latter compared to the former. In matters related to eating and worshipping, they had a lot of queries. The fact that Christians ate the forbidden meat, which was detestable to them, was also discussed. The method of burying the dead was also compared between how they do it and how Christians do it. They initially asked, “Do you burn your dead bodies?” These aspects often made things challenging, as they would go on about their faith in Islam and how being a Muslim is the best thing to be.

The long hours of intensive discussion about faith and practice with the elderly men and women in the community, were overwhelming. It provided so much insight into their worldview, which was heavily influenced by their religion. I agree with Geertz

(1973), “Religion as a cultural system” where he stresses that religious symbols formulate “ a basic congruence” between a particular style of life and a specific metaphysic and thus function to synthesize a people’s ethos and their world view. The ethos refers to the aesthetic style, tone, and quality of their life- and their worldview, their most comprehensive ideas of order (Morris 1987:313). This idea clearly reflects in the way the Gujjars view themselves and how religion is so entwined with their culture and lifestyle.

All the conversations on religion with the people that I have had cumulatively built up my thesis over time, because of their enthusiasm and interest showing me why they believe in the things that they practice and say about them. Their society is a good example of how Islam is practiced amidst the challenges of nomadic life. After I explained to them the purpose of my research, they generally commented,

*“ Ye to hein ki aap Gujjaron ke liye aya aur hamara upar likhne chahate hein. Gujjar kahi tarha ke hotein hein. Aur sab jaga par paye jayenge. Gujjar Hindustan mein hein, aur Kahmiri Gujjar bhi hein, aur bahut sare Gujjar accha posts mein kaam karte hein, koi bara M.P bhi hein Politics mein. Lekin ham jo hein alak hein. Hamare upar doosra kitab likhna kyon ki ham khanabadosh gujjar hein. Doosre gujjaron se ham aalak hein. Voh log bahut aage chalagaya.”*

(Yes, you have come here to write about us the Gujjars, but you have to realise that there are different kinds of Gujjars. You will find Gujjars in Hindustan, there are Kashmiri Gujjars, lot of Gujjars are there who are in high posts and who are big M.P’s in state politics, but please write a different book on us since we are the nomadic Gujjar. Do not associate them with us. They are way ahead of us in every aspect of their lives)

Their statement reveals the internal scenario within the community, showing that things are not as simple as it looks from the outside, in terms of who the Gujjars are; for there is exclusion of some groups within the community and these people want to

assert their identity as the marginalized group within. This gave me a direction to pursue, and keeping their suggestion in mind, I concentrated more in my research on issues of the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars as well as Khanabadosh Bakarwals, who consider themselves as the neglected lot within the community<sup>24</sup>. At times, I was distracted by their pathetic socio-economic conditions and lack of their political voice, which contributed to their backwardness as compared to the rest of the population, who are ahead of them on many counts. Everywhere I went, they narrated with immense conviction, their miseries and struggles, of being nomads and being neglected by the local government. Socio-economic provisions that are available to them have not benefitted a major chunk of the population, as power remains in the hands of few. When I was distracted by all the talk about negligence, I was brought back to my area of study- religion, when they themselves often brought God in their conversations, by saying “*Raab hi jaane, kyon ham esa zindagi jee te hein.*?” (Only God knows why we are living such lives?”, “*Upar wala ke marzi ke khilaf kaun jasakte hein.*” (Who can argue against the decision made by the one who stays up-God?) In such difficulties, their faith in God, and calling upon God, is an aspect that led me to pursue aspects of their belief and the contours of it that are reflected in the way they conduct their everyday lives.

### **Challenges of fieldwork and limitations of study**

There are several limitations in this research. Firstly, it was not possible to visit all the Gujjar settlements in different parts of Jammu and Kashmir, considering the

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<sup>24</sup> There are many among them who have adopted sedentary lifestyle and living better lives than the former.

limited time as well as the wide dispersion of Gujjars in the state. The main idea was to concentrate on a few selected settlements and undertake an in-depth study to get better idea on the culture and way of life of the people. Secondly, as mentioned earlier the issue of gender restriction was a hindrance for collecting data and accessing certain people. Initially because of the 'outsider' tag still attached to me, but mainly because I was a female, home stay was not a good option and they did not encourage it. Therefore, I had to put up with a non-Gujjar family, who were part of an NGO and who already had a good relationship with the Gujjars in the vicinity. It was not difficult to visit the Gujjars as they stayed just one or two kilometres away. In the plain areas of Jammu, in Rakh Baroti where I conducted part of my fieldwork, I had to travel nearly 30 kilometres everyday as I was not allowed to stay in their houses.

Anthropologists often go to the field with certain presumptions, which can be positive as well as negative for the research. When there are biases, one unknowingly discards important information which can hinder the learning process. Hence, writing about another culture or society becomes quite challenging. To be able to dissect and present properly how this people group represent themselves as 'individuals', 'Gujjars', 'nomads' or as 'Muslims' was my a difficult task. Every time, I converse with them, these categories always come up, as they themselves bring it up. For instance, while speaking about their economic lives, they bring up their dilemmas of being Khanabadosh and the apathy of the government towards them. Also, when it comes to their faith and belief in God, they claim wholeheartedly that they are faithful *musalman* (Muslims). Also their identity as Gujjars, which is

different from that of the Dogras or the Kashmirs or the Gaddis of the region, along with their divisions within as Dodhi, Bakarwal and Desi Gujjars make things more complicated as well as interesting to study. Geertz rightly points out this concern where he says,

*“...the anthropologist is always inclined to turn toward the concrete, the particular the microscopic. We are the miniaturists of the Social Sciences, painting on lilliputian canvases with what we take to be delicate strokes.”*  
(1968:4)

Indeed the first time the Gujjars themselves revealed a kind of tension and inequality within them, my focus shifted to that issue. This made me explore further and obtain better insights into their everyday lives and experiences. Even in issues regarding faith, things were not uniform, with regard to certain forms of piety, rituals and adherences like *pir* reverence. All these aspects further directed me in my area of research. However, no ethnography is a perfect venture as there are, as mentioned earlier, setbacks as one is still an *etic* observer most of the time, even if one claims to it the *emic* way.

Varisco’s statement is an encouragement, however, as to why ethnographic study is important and needed despite the setbacks. He says,

*“Being an ethnographer does not make a scholar objective nor erase cultural presuppositions, but it is certainly a leg up over being a blatant religious partisan or armchair theorist....Only by being there, observing behavior and its consequences, could the anthropologist begin to unravel the local meaning of behavior responsible to textual precedent.”* (2005: 139-141)

Unraveling “local meaning of behavior” i.e., why people think in the way they do about themselves, other people, about the challenges they face, is the utmost task for

an anthropologist. Even in my research, which is centrally on understanding the religion of the Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir, observing the local meanings of behavior especially with regard to their belief and practices through everyday interactions have helped immensely. The observations regarding religion were intertwined with many other social, economic and political institutions that the people were part of and it would not have been possible without actually seeing them by being physically present and interacting with them. In terms of availability of sources regarding their religious practice, it was scarce as their origin is still debated and also their conversion to Islam is a recent event, during the Mughal rule, so prior to that their religious identity is still not clearly known. The interest in exploring the religious dimension of this people group is a challenge that I took up for my research as the whole idea of what is faith, belief, practices, and why people believe in what they believe and how they express their piety in different ways. These are fundamental anthropological endeavors and are worth exploring; and hence their identity as nomads in the 21<sup>st</sup> century carrying a baggage of challenges with regard to their faith and other areas of their lives, need to be explored. Also, while conducting fieldwork, I realized that men and women here located themselves in two completely different worlds. Interviews with men were generally more formal<sup>25</sup>, while with women and girls, it revealed a whole new world which was so out of the box, where there were expressions of piety, but with a certain kind of resistance,

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<sup>25</sup> As seen in the work of Abu-Lughod where she mentions that among the Bediouns only a limited range of topics could be politely covered (Abu-Lughod 2008:17).

often soft, yet communicating their desire for something better, that they wanted, which was beyond the domain of the social norm.

The ideas of women and piety along with the piety associated with men, *pirs* and the whole Islamic rituals will bring out the layers of Islam in their lives that they so closely uphold. So many of my informants were women whose lives I could observe at close range and were very accessible. Children, especially young boys and girls identified with their beliefs very strongly from a young age and with their observations on the *masjid*, *madrassas* and their stories about their education in *madrassas*. Interaction with the youth was also useful in obtaining information on their idea about their faith and the struggles they face. All these gave a holistic view about the people among whom the fieldwork was conducted, revealing a community that was unique and rich in their traditional lifestyle practices.

The challenges that I encountered were in trying to relate with them through their everyday activities and conversations. Not being able to learn Gojri and speak Gojri, I depended more on conversing with them in Urdu and Hindi and thus, language was a challenging factor. However, with fluency in Hindi and Urdu, I could manage to converse with them. I also at times took the help of interpreters, which helped in cases where my informants were not fluent with Hindi or Urdu. Despite the hiccups in communicating with the people, they amazed me with their effort to communicate back with me with zeal. Alongside I managed to pick up a few Gojri terms and sentences, which impressed them and further opened the space for learning Gojri from them.

In terms of limitations in researching religion among them, there were many. The topic of religion is too vast to be covered in a single ethnographic encounter, despite the academic training. Also, trying to get into the muddy affair of the conventional lived vs Ideal Islam debate in my work could not be avoided, though in relation to these two concepts, an alternative perspective has also been attempted to understand the religion of the Gujjars. Also, since anthropology focuses on studying the holistic aspects of the society, one could not avoid getting into topics other than religion.

### **Conclusion**

This research attempts to study the religion of the Gujjars using Geertz's definition of religion wherein he uses the model *of* and model *for* reality and Bourdieu's theory of practice using the concepts of *field* and *doxa*. The culture of Gujjar where religion forms major component is conceptualized using Sherry Ortner's perspectives on *agency* and *subject*. It attempts to re-examine the existing debates in anthropology of religion, particularly anthropology of Islam which is built on the popular notions of lived and ideal and attempts to come up with an alternate approach that can clarify the existing debate better. Also, the researcher's experience in the field have shed light on the socio-economic conditions of the Gujjars, their classification and distinctions within, which is vital for understanding their worldview. In this thesis, wherever the term 'Gujjar' is used it is inclusive of the Dodhi, Desi and Bakarwal and wherever there is need for specification, the terms Dodhi, Desi and Bakarwal are exclusively used.

## Chapter 3

### The Outline of the Gujjar World

*Boundary, by definition  
marks the beginning and  
end of the community*  
Barth (1969)

#### **Introduction**

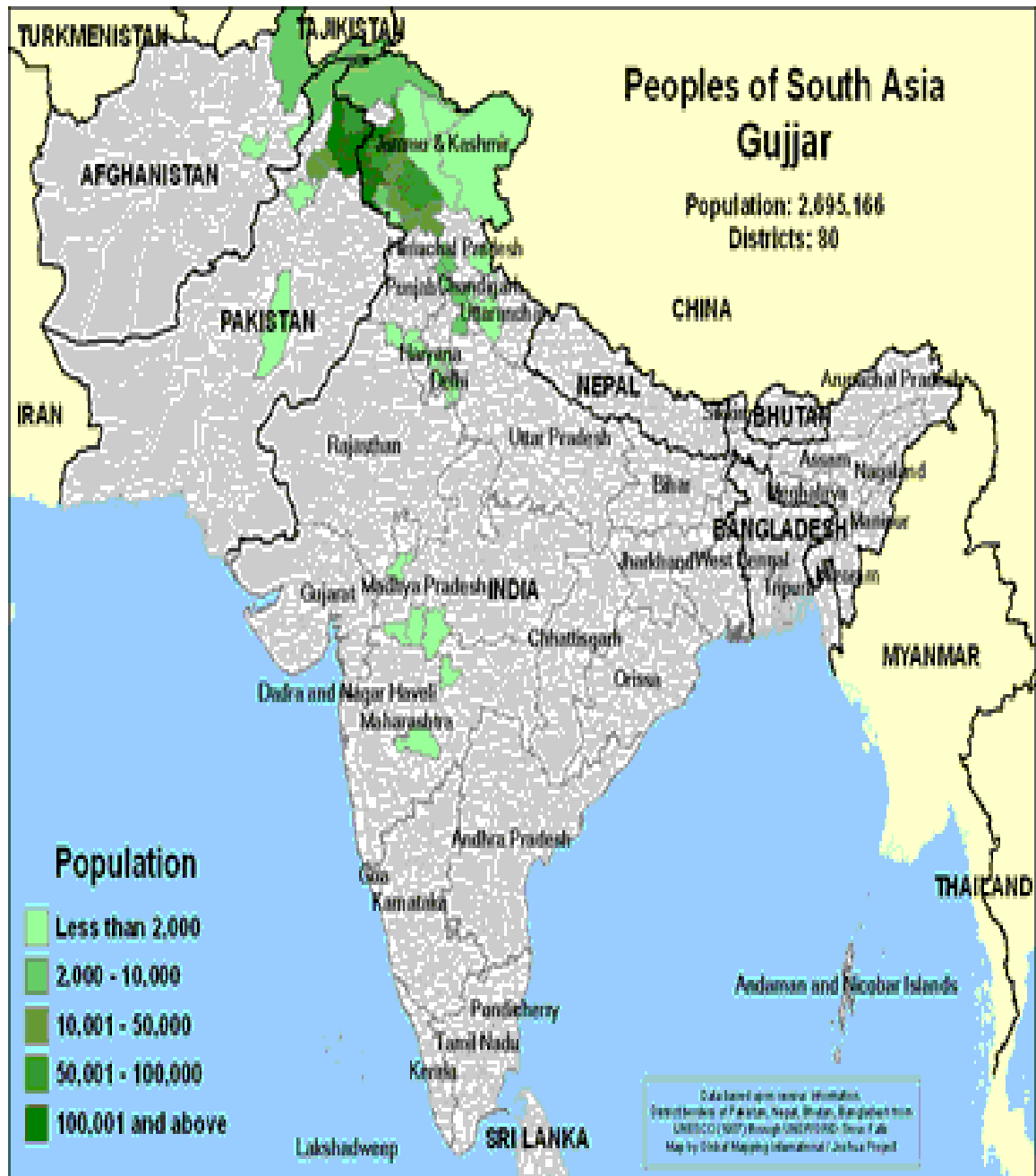
This chapter focuses on the origin and migration, identity and tradition, language, social status, economy and social organization of the Gujjars. In addition, the intricacies within the ethnic group, in terms of similarities and differences, the classifications they make to identify within themselves are examined. All these aspects are loosely interconnected with the religion that they practice. Therefore, it is necessary to understand them before the religion is discussed at length.

#### **Origin and Migration**

The Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir assert that their traditions are distinct from other communities in the region, and acknowledge the fact their forefathers since were nomadic they did not have a fixed geographical identity. There are many debates about their origin, history and migration. According to Tyagi (2009:241), all the three linguistic variations of Gujjars i.e., Gujjars, Gurjar and Gujar traditionally fall under the category of Kshatriya or warrior class who were the former rulers of the Gujjar-Pratihara empire which included much of the Northern India during the eight and the ninth centuries. Many scholars <sup>1</sup> are of the view that they are partial

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<sup>1</sup> Smith opines that the ‘Gujjars’ were foreign immigrants, “closely associated with and possibly allied in blood with the white Hun” (1914:32). The ‘Gurdjaras’



Map 3: Gujar: People of South Asia (People Omid / Joshua Project / Global Mapping)

according to Bhandarkar (1989) have supposedly entered Northern India about 550 A.D with or soon after the White Huns. See Munshi (1955).

descendants of any number of Eurasian peoples like the Scythians, Georgians, and Khazars of the Caspian Sea, who took part in the Scythian invasions of South Asia from the 5th century BCE to the 1st century CE. Some others speculate that they may have connections with some other Turko-Iranian tribes but merged with the local Indo-Aryan speaking groups, settled mainly in Gujarat, Punjab and Kashmir regions. Scholars like Ibbetson (1882:6-7) and others are of the view that Gujars are aboriginals due to their resemblances with the Jat and the Ahirs and their Aryan features. The *Gujars* (sic), Jat and Ahirs are considered to be of the same social standing though the Ahirs are considered as Hindus who worship Sri Krishna and Bando (a snake). Their birth, death and marriages ceremonies are like that of the Gujars.

British administrators tried to connect the inhabitants of Rajasthan, Punjab and Kashmir with the itinerants of Afghanistan based on their Indo-Aryan morphological features.<sup>2</sup> But Indian scholars like Ghurye (1969:126) argues that the term Indo-Aryan is misleading as it should not be understood as a mixture Indian and Aryan but as Aryan type of people in India. The issue of origin and identity of Gujjars has been a long standing debate between academicians that still remains unsolved<sup>3</sup>. The word

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<sup>2</sup> Risley (1915) in his famous seven fold classification includes inhabitants of Punjab, Gujarat and Kashmir.

<sup>3</sup>Scholarly writings reveal a huge debate regarding the assumption of foreign affiliation or origin of the Gujjars, which is not agreed upon. Many others did not favour the ethnic relations of the Gurjars with the Huns and also disapproved of their foreign origin concept. Bhandarkar (1989) also highlights that the ethnic relations and other social customs of the Gujjars and Huns do not match. Also the absence of any reference of the Gurjaras in earlier literature and inscriptions of the Huns and their Kingdom at the time of Huen Tsang precludes the possibility of any association, whatsoever, between the two tribes. See Munshi (1955) also.

'Gujjar' has many intricacies attached within. It is a conglomeration of different ideas that the Gujjars themselves describe. The Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir distinguish within themselves based on the place they originally lived in and migration from. They commonly classify themselves as the Pahari Gujjars, the Laddia Gujjars, the Poonchi Gujjars, the Bhaderwahi Gujjars, and the Kashmiri Gujjars based on the area where they live or migrate to in summers or winters.

The *Pahari* Gujjars are closely connected to the *pahar* (mountains) of Jammu and Kashmir where most of them have settled down. Though *Pahari* people are often referred to as Hindu mountain dwellers, the Gujjars who have migrated and settled there over the years are also known as *Pahari* Gujjars<sup>4</sup>. Another group is the *Laddia* Gujjars, who migrate to Ladda mountain ranges of Jammu and Kashmir for their seasonal migration. Many among them have settled there over the years. We also have the Gujjars who inhabit the Poonch region and call themselves as *Poonchi* Gujjars while the Gujjars who go to the mountainous region of Bhaderwah for their seasonal migration are called the *Baderwahi* Gujjars and the Gujjars found in Kashmir valley are called *Kashmiri* Gujjars etc. All these Gujjars are mostly semi-nomadic in their lifestyle and are buffalo herders. Bakarwals also trace their origin to Allaiwal and Kunhar region of Pakistan, where they claim to have migrated from.

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<sup>4</sup> The *pahari* area is a long and narrow strip along the southern face of the Himalayas that comprises of the northernmost border of the India with North Indian culture which also meets the southern edge of Tibet throughout its length with its distinct culture. *Paharis* exhibit physical isolation from the other areas and groups (Berreman 1970).

Gujjars are also found scattered in different parts of the country and thus various terms like Gujjars of Jammu, Gujjars of Uttar Pradesh, Gujjars of Nainital, Gujjars of Himachal etc., are commonly found in the writings of different scholars. One reason for such wide distribution of Gujjars in India and adjacent countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and so on, is because of their nomadic pastoral lifestyle pursued to meet the needs of their cattle. Gujjars are normally associated with North-Western India, especially the state of Gujarat (Singh 2003). It is probable that the Gujjars might have been historically in one place but with time and various factors, they might have split and migrated separately. Most Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir that I met said that their original homeland was Gujarat. Some claim that they have come from Pakistan and even have relatives in Pakistan and beyond. Due to their traditional nomadic life without permanent habitation it is difficult to trace their place of origin, and the debate still continues among scholars.

Apart from the many theories, it is believed that Gujjars migrated to Jammu and Kashmir from Gujarat (via Rajasthan) and Hazara district of NWFP<sup>5</sup> where they were mostly Hindus. But now they are all Muslims. While the Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh who are believed to have entered the region through three main directions - Chamba (Jammu and Kashmir), Sirmur from Poonch and Kangra and Bilaspur from the neighbouring districts are both Hindu and Muslim (Shyam 2006:62). They are also mostly semi-nomadic and depend on buffalo herding for their livelihood.

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<sup>5</sup> See Kapoor et.al (1994:43-44)

## **Language of Gujjars**

All Gujjars seem to speak their mother tongue- 'Gujjari', also spelled as 'Gujuri', 'Gojuri', and 'Gojiri' regardless of their religion and area<sup>6</sup>. While other populations of Jammu and Kashmir speak Kashmiri, Dogri, Urdu, Punjabi and other Indian languages. Another aspect is the vast difference in the way Gojri is spoken by Gujjars all over the state. Gojri is a language that belongs to the Indo-European language family, under the Indo-Aryan sub-family. Gojri (or Gujari) is the language spoken by all traditionally pastoralists here. The famous linguists Grierson (1973:925) and Masica (1991:48) have claimed that Gojri is closely related to Mewati, a Rajasthani language. There is also a close relationship between Gojri phonology and Punjabi (Sharma 1982). It is the third largest spoken language in the state after Kashmiri and Dogri. It is also spoken by thousands of Gujjars in Himachal Pradesh and by many in Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

Gujjars living in different areas also speak other languages like Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Punjabi, Pothohari, Pahari language (such as Dogri and Kangri), Pashto language, Dardic languages (such as Kashmiri and Khowar), and Balti. Gojri shares more morphological features with Rajasthani dialects but the process of transmission of these features is not very clear and its position in Indo-Aryan remains a problem. It also shares certain common retentions with Punjabi and Kangri. The Gojri language is primarily spoken in Poonch and Rajouri districts of Jammu and Kashmir. In other districts of the Kashmir valley and Jammu division it is spoken by a

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<sup>6</sup> Tyagi (2009: 241).

minority of the population. Gojri is largely influenced by the local dominant languages. In Kashmir valley, it is influenced by Kashmiri, in Jammu division by Dogri, Punjabi and other languages spoken in the regions of the Gojri settlements. Gojri speakers are often bilinguals. They use Gojri for intra group communications and use the local dominant language for communication with others.

There are also significant variations in the Gojri spoken by the Gujjars and the Bakarwals but both can understand each other's accents. Gojri shares many linguistic features and vocabulary with the neighboring languages. The use of kinship terms is also similar to the Hindi speaking communities. For instance, the term used for grandson and granddaughter by many Hindi speaking groups are *pota* and *poti* whereas Gujjars call their paternal grandchildren *potra* (grandson) and *potri* (granddaughter)<sup>7</sup>. Gujjars claim that the Gujjars from Poonch area speak the purest form of Gojri than those in Jammu and other places. Linguists like George Grierson (1968), and Bailey (1938), had worked extensively on the development of Gojri language and grammar. Many scholars (Alvi 2013, Koul 2000) mention the negligence by certain State and Central Government institutions, autonomous and voluntary organizations regarding the development of Gojri as compared to other languages of the State.

The Gujjars and Bakarwals also value giving Arabic education to their children. Among the Dodhi Gujjars, we found that most of the children could read and write in

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<sup>7</sup> Makku a 70 year old Gujjar woman in Jammu calls her son's children as *potri* (granddaughter) and *potra* (grandson), while her daughter's children as *dautri* (granddaughter) and *dautra* (grandson).

Arabic. It is a part of their religious training as they consider Arabic as a ‘heavenly language’, the language in which Qu’ran was revealed. They also understand Urdu and Hindi to some extent and can converse with outsiders using it. They somehow<sup>8</sup> manage to speak Urdu which is the official language of Jammu and Kashmir.

English is still considered to be a language of the *angrez* (English foreigners). Most of the Gujjar children in the towns of Jammu attend English medium schools but they fare better in Urdu than English. A mixture of Hindi and Urdu is used as lingua franca in Jammu and other districts when they sell milk, buy household items and the like. Not every Gujjar child attends *madrassa* for religious learning. Nowadays, they prefer the secular government schools as most of them provide free education and train the children to face the world. Education in *madrassas* is limited to few children as it is expensive and does not aid in obtaining a secular job. Many Gujjars let their children attend some Arabic classes in the mosque but give more importance to secular education.

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<sup>8</sup> In terms of Urdu literacy they are unable to educate themselves with Urdu language/ literature. Yet it is observed that Gujjars tend to excel far above Kashmiris in terms of functional capacity in Urdu language. Gojri is a language much is closer to Urdu than Kashmiri and even educated Kashmiris routinely make mistakes in both understanding and speaking in the Urdu language. Gujjars tend to be conversant in Urdu and Kashmiri as well as the languages of the places they migrate to, but the sedentary Kashmiris in remote villages tend to struggle more with Urdu unless they manage to attain higher levels of education. Only educated Kashmiris handle Urdu better than others. Also, schools in Gujjar areas are not so well equipped as those in the more affluent Kashmiri areas (personal conversation with Ron Ahlbrecht, coordinator of an NGO that works with the community)

## **Identity and tradition**

The traditional livelihood practices of the Gujjars associated with their cattle make them unique and give distinct identity. Also, most of the Gujjars practice transhumance which is a type of pastoral nomadism that involves seasonal migration along with their cattle for distances covering 200 to 300 kilometers in each trip between their summer and winter homes. After five to six months they again change their location. Movement is integral to the nomadic lifestyle and tradition. People's stories about their past revolves around physical movements and their association with the places in the mountains, their cattle, their *deras*, endogamous clan groups and their beliefs and practices. All these give an idea of their own perception about their identity, their experiences and their condition, which distinguishes them from the rest. The prevailing environmental and socio-political conditions determine the use of the pastures during transhumance and their places of stay. Pastoral nomads have some very intriguing and unique characteristics related to the kinds of resources they rely on for their living<sup>9</sup>. Their resources include not only their cattle, but also the local environment, the routes they undertake, the local population and their interaction with them.

Semi-nomadic Gujjars and Bakarwals, move from lower altitude tropical forests to the higher altitude alpine pasture land, through the middle altitude rugged

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<sup>9</sup> For details see Hayden 2003.

mountainous region every year<sup>10</sup>. The term Khanabadosh which is used and prefix to Gujjar or Bakarwal originally refers to the nomads or people on the move<sup>11</sup>. For the Gujjars, being Khanabadosh refers to a tradition they are proud of- the seasonal migration involving a long journey with their precious possessions- buffaloes, the saddled horses and donkeys; reuniting with their relatives in the summer or winter locations.

A symbiotic relationship has developed between the pastoral and agricultural communities over time and is still maintained. Gujjars have made a significant contribution to the local ecosystem. For instance, the cattle dung which is strewn en route their migration is good manure for the soil in the mountains and terrains. Secondly, the Gujjar who are migrating with the cattle, also have a symbiotic relationship with the local farmers or agriculture land owners. The cattle are allowed to graze freely in their fields for the entire summer and in return, the local people benefit as their fields are cleared of weeds and unwanted dried grass and enriched by the manure in the form of cattle dung, all of which aids them in cultivation. In the

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<sup>10</sup> It is often seen that there is a delicate human adaptation with nature in transhumance, while utilizing the marginal and fragile ecosystems of pasture distributed on various altitudes and divergent slopes (Khatana1992: 23).

<sup>11</sup> According to Khatana even the Nomadic Tribes Report has highlighted the distinct features of Indian *khanabadosh* (wandering tribes). Further, according to him, in the Indian context, all sorts of nomadism and transhumance are organised spatial movements within a geo-ecological setting to fulfill the basic and higher needs in a way so that a near perfect balance is maintained between men, animals and environment (1992:24). Raghaviah also refers to the Indian nomads as, '*khanabadoshes*', which according to him is a common term used in North-Western India, to refer to a people group who are generally shy and not ambitious, have a mobile lifestyle, and travel on familiar paths with their kin groups. There are some who hunt, and collect food, while some others graze their cattle or sell petty artifacts etc. (1968: 154).

mountains where they make their summer homes, the Gujjars maintain a good relationship with the locals by providing milk and milk products and in turn receive cash or help and support from the locals in terms of fire wood supply or corn for the cattle. In terms of social obligations<sup>12</sup> also, it is seen that people are accountable to one another even though their religion or ethnicity is different as they are all united by the geography of the land which they inhabit be it in the summer or winter.

### **Social Status of Gujjars today**

Most of the Muslim Gujjars who are listed among India's Scheduled Tribes inhabit Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir (Singh 1991). The Gujjars and the Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir were notified as the Scheduled Tribe by the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act 1991, while the Gujjars in Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh are placed under Other Backward Classes (OBC). The Gujjars in Rajasthan are still fighting for Scheduled Tribe status from their current higher OBC status. In Jammu and Kashmir, Gujjars constitute the third largest ethnic group with a population of 7, 63, 806 according to the 2001 census<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, Lal Din (an elderly *zamindar* Desi Gujjar who is also partially semi-nomadic) mentioned that he is always invited for any dispute settlement cases involving the local Hindus or in issues concerning his own community in the Sanasar area. This shows that Gujjars also have been able to cater to the needs of the local population through various services.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly the 2011 census was rejected by most of the Gujjars and Bakarwals stating that they were not adequately covered by the Census and as a result there has been displeasure over the entire issue and a few organizations have suggested conducting a "special census" for them. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/states/other-states/article2235769.ece> (accessed on June 2012)

Around 99.3 percent of the population of Gujjar and Bakarwal in Jammu and Kashmir follow Islam. (Census of India 2001).

Despite their Scheduled Tribe status, they still remain a very backward group in socio-economic conditions and in particular in the aspects of education<sup>14</sup>. The Khanabadosh Gujjars and Bakarwals are severely affected by the brunt of globalization and development. There is also the problem of classification and enumeration of nomadic communities which adds to the pile of problems. The government blames it on their seasonal migration to various parts of the state which makes it impossible to enumerate properly and look into their grievances. Khanabadosh Gujjars and Bakarwals complain that they are not given their due importance and that the Desi Gujjars who are comparatively well off take all the benefits meant for them.

In the recent years, their seasonal migration is facing many challenges due to the rise in population as said before. The availability of pasture lands have decreased and this poses a great threat to their livelihoods. Road traffic congestion, cases of sheep and goats being stolen by the local people, and natural calamities like cold weather conditions adversely affecting their cattle are their important concerns. In addition to

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<sup>14</sup> During the time of Pandit Jawarhar Lal Nehru, a lot of concern was expressed about socio-economic upliftment of the Gujjars (Bharadwaj 1994). He expressed his desire to abolish the demarcation of this community as Scheduled Tribe/Caste as it creates an inferiority complex in the minds of the people. Nehru advocated the need to protect the Gujjars from miseries and to re-settle them in every respect; however he could not see that happening during his lifetime. Since then they have come a long way with the recognition by the Government of India as a Scheduled Tribe, but many things are yet to be done to raise the social, economic and political status of the Gujjars, especially the nomadic and semi-nomadic situations.

these issues, sedentarization of Gujjars is another aspect which is slowly on the rise demanding certain adaptive strategies. Efforts made by the state to settle them for their development have brought about many changes in their traditional livelihood practices. Most of the Gujjars who practice transhumance often use expressions like “we are because of our cattle” meaning that it is for the sake of their cattle that they undertake their tedious seasonal movement from the summer homes to winter homes every year. Thus, settling down completely is not an option that most of them consider.<sup>15</sup> Presently the Gujjars who are in the process of leaving their tradition of transhumance, are found keeping different kinds of cattle that was not part of their traditional practice. For instance, we find among the Dodhi Gujjars a recent trend of keeping sheep and goats also apart from their buffaloes for their livelihood. It provides better income as they can sell the animal as well as the wool and the milk. Unlike the buffaloes on which the premium of maintenance in terms of the fodder they require is high, the goats and sheep are not that expensive to rear. They have also set up vegetable gardens by planting potatoes and other crops. But they remain unhappy with their lifestyle when they compare themselves with their own people like the Desi Gujjars (those who own land) or some rich Bakarwals. The gap among the Gujjars between the landlords, those with small plots of land and the landless

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<sup>15</sup> Hussain mentions and agrees that advance stages of transhumance leads to economic disparity and social tension which ultimately helps in the sedentarization of these people. He points out further that in the process of sedentarization, the very rich and very poor are the first to give up transhumance. Settling down of some of the pastoral nomads reduces the pressure of the population and flock on the pastures which ultimately helps in maintaining the resilient character of the delicate ecosystems (2000:27).

continues to increase. They were migrating until 1947 after which many stopped going to their summer homes due to various reasons.

In the context of this brief background about the Gujjars, they can be classified on the basis of three parameters - economic activities/occupation, geography/region and 'Zat' or clan name. Such classification however has limitations as it tends to overlap due to assimilation and acculturation over the years.

### **Economy**

Economy and livelihood patterns mark the divisions among the Gujjars with which they identify and differentiate themselves as it has already been stated. But this differentiation has consequences on the religious evaluation of people. Therefore it is essential to examine the livelihood patterns of Gujjar in detail<sup>16</sup>. Those who domesticate buffaloes are called Banihara or Dodhi Gujjar, while the Bakarwals (also often called Bakarwal Gujjar) are those who rear sheep and goats. Many aspects have changed today as they no longer follow some of their traditional ways of life strictly. Some scholars (Rao and Cassimir 1982, 2003 and Rao 1988, 1992, 1995) have called them Kandi, valley and Dodhi Gujjars<sup>17</sup>. Most of them are

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<sup>16</sup> Raghaviah (1968:154) mentions the Gujjars and Bakarwals as the chief pastoralist cattle breeders in the North Western states of India. He also writes about their commercial flock raising activities- 'Gujjars' raised cattle and 'Bakarwals' raised goats and sheep. Khatana (1992:51) has also given the classification of Gujjars based on their occupation and settlement types. There are Gujjars who are cultivators and Gujjars who practice transhumance.

<sup>17</sup> Rao (1988) also mentions the presence of three overwhelmingly endogamous communities all of whom fall under the exonym 'Gujjar'. a) The 'Kandi' Gujjar are those who were sedentary agriculturalist or transhumant cattle breeders in south of valley; b) the 'valley' Gujjar, who spent the whole of the year in the Kashmir valley

engaged in sedentary agriculture to nomadic pastoralism in 1980's when they were initially studied. Many today are into other occupations apart from their traditional livelihood practices. The economic activity pursued forms an important mark of Gujjar identification as most of the Gujjars say, "we are different because of our economic activities." In their terminology economic activities refers to *pesha* (livelihood/occupation) and their *rehen-sahen* or *taur tarika* (lifestyle or habits), which is based in the occupation. On this basis Gujjars classify themselves as Dodhi Gujjar, Desi Gujjar and Bakarwal (Bakarwal Gujjar), which shall be discussed now.

### ***i) Dodhi Gujjars***

The word Dodhi is derived from the word *doodh* meaning milk in Hindi, Urdu and Gojri too. Dodhi Gujjars keep buffaloes for their livelihood. They generally sell milk and some of them also sell milk products like *ghee* (clarified butter) and *koya* (boiled thickened milk) used for making sweets. In Jammu they are also called *baniyara* which generally refers to milkmen. There are thousands of Gujjars in Jammu itself who sell milk and are recognized as popular milk suppliers<sup>18</sup>. Many of the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars still continue to undertake the seasonal migration with their buffaloes on foot. Their existence depends on a geographical cycle, cyclical

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as transhumant cow and buffalo breeders, with wealthier families investing in agriculture; c) The nomadic buffalo breeders called 'dodhi Gujar' or 'banihara Gujar' who spent the winters in Punjab and the summers in the upper reaches of the Kashmir valley, where some of the wealthier ones own lands.

<sup>18</sup> Gujjars cater to around 80 percent of the requirement of milk and milk products of the urban population of the state (Sharma 2005:105).

migration and their livestock. They are naturally tied to their ancestral heritage of undertaking migration and share a close connection to the *pahar*.

Their everyday life revolves around their *dera*<sup>19</sup>, the *baiz* (buffaloes) and their *mazhab* (religion) Islam. The streets and market places in Jammu town, Udampur town, Kud area and many other places in the region are good places to meet the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars selling milk and engaging with their customers. Women in groups of two or three with their milk cans, clothed in *salwar kameez* and head covered with a *duppata* (*long scarf*), while men in their *kurta*, *pyjama*, *pirni* (waist coat) and *paggar* (head gear) are easily recognized in a crowd by their brown beards and their milk cans. They are well built in their physique-generally tall and have sturdy bodies, fair and tanned skin, which they attribute to their diet of milk and milk products like butter and buttermilk. Women too are mostly chubby, fair to tanned skin and with strong hands that laboured day in and out milking, feeding, washing, and cooking. They sell milk to *mithai ka dukan* (sweet shops), *chai ka dukan* (tea shops), and other small hotels that are owned by Kashmiri, Hindu or Muslim. Households also buy milk from the Dodhi Gujjars. They buy foodstuff like rice, tea leaves, sugar, salt, vegetables, along with fodder for their cattle like rice husk, fresh straw from their daily earnings. They often complain of their inability to save money by the end of the day because of having to spend more on fodder for their cattle.

Living conditions of the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars differ from place to place and from those of the sedentary Gujjars. In many cases the condition is pitiable. Most of

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<sup>19</sup> Family units consisting of married and unmarried children, which may be called extended family

the houses are built of straw and in few cases people build sheds for the cattle outside the houses if they can afford it. In a few houses in the Rakh Baroti Gujjar settlement in Jammu, they keep fans and even coolers as a necessity, and a couple of houses have televisions with cable connection. Some own horse carts that serve as a means of transport to go to the nearby market to sell milk while many own motor bikes. However again, the Gujjars in Sanasar lead a completely different lifestyle, which is quite simple without a wide variety of professions available for them. They live in mud walled huts called *dhoks* and some of them have started using cemented walls for their huts with hay roofs. The buffaloes are mostly kept inside the house on one side where they tie them and feed them, and on the other side, the bed in one corner along the hearth. At dawn women and men get up and wash up to perform their *wuzu* (ritual cleansing) after which they perform their *namaz* which is their foremost duty. They either go to a water source nearby for their *wuzu*, or use the water that was stored previously. After the *namaz* they feed the buffaloes and milk the buffaloes and by the time the sun rises, they are ready to deliver milk.

Many of the Dodhi Gujjars are scattered in different parts of Jammu, in places like Satwari which is at the banks of river Tawi, Jammu, Udhampur district, Surnisar, Bantalab and so on. A large number of Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars still migrate to the cool mountains of Patnitop, Sanasar and Baderwah despite the challenges. Their seasonal migration begins from early part of *baisakh mahina* (month of April) when summer begins and they retreat to the cool mountainous regions between Jammu and Kashmir and spend about five months in their summer locations which are in very high mountainous locations. Mounting their horses and bullock carts with the basic

essential commodities like cooking pots, blankets and clothes they either move to some nearby areas or retreat to distant places high up on the mountains which take at least weeks to reach on foot with the cattle, mainly buffaloes. Few members choose to stay back in the winter location while the rest of the family travels. People look forward to reuniting with their consanguineal and affinal relations in the summer location.

We find them immersed in a life involving sharing their unique culture, their association with their cattle and enjoying occasions of marriages, religious festivals and even funerals, where they enjoy the company of their family members and relatives. Women often meet their relatives and neighbours, chat, engage themselves in every day works like washing clothes together, baby sitting or stitching clothes. While in their summer homes, it is a reunion with their loved ones. Gujjar girls often sing songs and pass their time in the summer homes on the mountains, careful not to let the men hear them singing. Men also sit among themselves, chat and while away their time either smoking from the *hookah*<sup>20</sup> or planning about grazing the buffaloes, discussing other crisis issues related to the community etc. They continue to undertake seasonal migrations for the sake of their cattle. Children play around in the water with their buffaloes as they take bath, women milk them and talk to them like their own children often giving them names, and men look after them, walking miles with them on foot every day. Even before they eat they make sure that their cattle are fed first. Parents give more importance to learning the art of buffalo herding rather

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<sup>20</sup> a wooden jar filled with tobacco leaves and with a pipe outlet. The user inhales the burnt tobacco from the extreme end of the pipe outlet.

than sending them to school. Small boys and girls accompany the elders to graze the cattle. Young girls also help their mothers in the household chores and taking care of their younger siblings. In most of the huts we find women and girls adorning the walls with beautiful pictures and drawings out of chalk and paints. On the other side of the house the buffaloes are kept and fed.

Houses do not have doors but they sleep freely-women and children generally sleep inside while men sleep outside without any fear. The buffaloes stay inside the house where they live. The smell of buffalo dung and urine that fills the house along with the smoke from the firewood creates a suffocating atmosphere in the house. Inside the house there is a place high up on the roof or a little below but above the ground for keeping the Qur'an. They revere the Qur'an to the outmost that just looking at it is considered auspicious. Nobody is allowed to utter anything against it. The sounding of the *azan* also brings the room in chaos to order as they stop whatever they were doing immediately. Alongside their reverence towards Allah and all the rituals and regulations they have to follow, they live with the growing challenges of leading a nomadic life in the present times. Bibi, an elderly woman from Rakh Baroti settlement says

*“Kitne hara aur accha the Baderwah ke Pahare, mein bata nahi sakte. Oof! bahut thand the pahar mein. Aur mein jab chota tha mere poora parivar jate the udhar. Toubah! Aaj ham idhar hein, itne garmi mein aur ham Baderwah nahi jate aab. Bahut mushkil hein.”*

(How green and good were the mountains of Baderwah I cannot express it. Oh! it was so cold in the mountains. And when I was young, all my family members used to go up there. Alas! Today we are here in this dry, hot place unable to move out because of many restraints)

This woman and her family along with many others in the settlement have stopped undertaking their seasonal migration to Baderwah *pahar* for more than ten years now. But they still want to assert their identity with the *pahar* that they used to go to. They often comment saying,

*“ham Baderwah ke mittii se janam hooa hein, ham Baderwahi hein aaj bhi, jahe ham aaj waha nahi jate, hamare majboori hein. Hamara pardada log waha jaate the kai saalo se.”*

(We are born from the soil of Baderwah; we are still Baderwahi even though we no longer migrate there in the present times due to various difficulties. Our ancestors went to that place since so many years).

The above statement was expressed by many elders in Rakh baroti Gujjar settlement. Their affinity towards the mountains of Baderwah speaks of a tradition that is so close-knit with nature and the land that provided them their needs for hundreds of years, which sadly, they can no longer see today. Their close encounters with nature constitute their memory artifact today. For instance, the mountain becomes the *memory artifact*- a living museum of a landscape where people are passing through and generations see those mountains where these memories are also nurtured. Many of them were born in the mountains and died there too, their cattle also were nourished in these mountains, as they claim that even today they cannot find such pure and green fodder for their cattle anywhere else than in these mountains.

They also have strong beliefs with regard to the spiritual beings in these mountains like *jinns* and *jogins*, that are seen as elements of fear as well as channels of blessings. The water sources as well as the air in these mountains are considered to be pure and refreshing. Today they are no longer able to access the mountains

because of several reasons. One of the reasons is that, the government encourages them to settle down in one place by giving them land and amenities. One of such many places is the Gujjar colony in Jammu, where the people were given land and now two generations are staying in the locality. Likewise, there are several smaller areas all over Jammu where many Gujjars have settled, some in government given lands, while some in lands of people of the neighboring communities with whom they have good relationships over many years. However, the interesting aspect of their lives is that they tend to live a dual lifestyle of being in one place, yet not fully giving up on their nomadic tradition, which is their identity. Though exact statistics are not available as to how many are fully sedentary or purely nomadic, large chunks of the Gujjars still undertake their seasonal migration every year.

#### **ii) *Desi Gujjars-***

Most of the nomadic Gujjars in due course of time have adapted to a settled life due to the various reasons<sup>21</sup> (See Plate No. 25). They no longer undertake seasonal migration. They are also known as *zamindar* Gujjar, meaning those who own lands. They also attribute their sedentary lifestyle because of the efforts of the state government. With the scarcity of land and resources, high expenses of transportation during their seasonal migration and also the need to avail themselves of other

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<sup>21</sup> Kavoori (2007) in a case study of Gujjars in Rajasthan found out that many Gujjars had little choice but to de-pastoralise. This was because of the lack of local resources and supportive institutions to keep cows. When they shifted to buffalo keeping and small scale agriculture, many of them lost the competitive advantages that go with a specialized niche. The Gujjars then face ecological and economic handicaps. According to him, the collapse of cattle pastoralism lies at the heart of Gujjar problem.

necessities like education, security, health and family welfare, they have joined the mainstream population in living a settled life. They are employed most often in white and blue collar jobs, like in Government offices and also in private institutions, as workers in shops, hotels and other private establishments. Interestingly, they still keep a few buffaloes for their use as well as for generating additional income. Some of their family members or relatives are still Khanabadosh and undertake seasonal migration.

Most Desi Gujjars have no recollection of their ancestral heritage of nomadic life or being tied to the mountains and they are contented in their present state. But they have their own prejudices against the Khanabadosh Gujjars. They look down on their hard tedious life, poor economic condition, lack of decency in terms of ‘properly’ dressing up and also in terms of being unclean and illiterate. They consider their lifestyle to be better in every way than their Khanabadosh counterparts. They live mostly in towns, RCC buildings with proper living facilities. Some send their children to good English medium schools and many are in good position in Government offices as officers, doctors, engineers and even politicians. They represent the upper creamy layer of the Gujjar community alienated from the Khanabadosh Gujjars. They do admit that they are all Gujjars but do not identify with the latter.

### iii) **Bakarwals**

The word Bakarwal literally meant *people* with goats. They are the Gujjars who rear sheep and goats for their livelihood. They are also Khanabadosh where many still

continue with the tradition of *radari* or the seasonal movement. According to Rao, it was in 1912, that official documents presented them as an ethnic group that may be local-those who have migrated from the border and have stayed in the country for a generation, or as foreign-those considered as undesirable new migrants (2011:59). This is also evident as most of the Gujjars and Bakarwals often mention that they have relatives on the other side of the border sharing similar economic lifestyle. Bakarwals undertake their seasonal migration for their sheep and goats every year, crossing dangerous terrains in the border from areas like Jammu to Poonch region to the Kashmir valley and much beyond. They migrate under severe climatic conditions often leading to loss of lives and property and sometimes harsh treatment by militants who threaten them or take away their cattle.

The Bakarwals are a subgroup of the more numerous Gujjars (Sharma 2009:14). In physique, they resemble the Dodhi Gujjars to some extent but differ in their height as they are found to be taller and slender as compared to the former (See Plate no.11 and Plate no. 12) Often both parties also like to distinguish each others in terms of their usage of Gojri or their cattle or in their mannerisms like ideas of religious piety, clothings and conduct. They are closely attached to their cattle and consider rearing sheep and goats as their lifeline. They generally say,

*“hum aapne baer aur bakre ke doodh se aur awaaz se unkoh pehchan lete hein. Hum aapne bacche jese palte hein aur unko doosre hazaar bakre ke beech bhi pehchan sakte hein.”*

(We can identify a goat by its milk and also by their bleats. The sheep and goats are like our children and we can identify them from among thousands of flocks)

This reveals their close association with their cattle, which is a characteristic similar to the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjar, for whom the buffaloes are the lifeline. Traditionally they did not own any land and depended on sheep and goats for their livelihood by selling their milk, meat and various products like wool. They also made their own sashes for their horses, dyed ropes and other accessories for their horses, goats and sheep. The creativity of the women folk is laudable as they weave/stitch colourful embroidered items like traditional hats and clothes, woolen carpets and blankets called *lui* from sheep's wool apart from doing household work and taking care of the children. Women also show great skill in making the household *chulha* (mud stove) in just 15-20 minutes. They also show immense hospitality and share their *lunali chai* (salty milk tea) in *piala* (small saucers) and *makki ke roti* (maize bread) to family and guests. They also knit and crochet for their various uses. Most of the Bakarwals live a very simple life ( See Plate no.13).

Today, many of them own land and have built houses made of brick walls with cement and tin roof as their winter shelter. Traditionally they either stayed in tents or occupied *dhoks* which the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars had built as their summer homes. It is interesting to note that they depend on each other indirectly, in terms of shelter. The Bakarwals use the *dhoks* whenever the Dodhi Gujjars vacate the place and move to the plains for their winter. Migrations for the Bakarwals are tougher as they move to higher altitudes in summer with tents as their temporary shelter. They rear hundreds of goats and sheep with good care at any point of time. A Bakarwal will always make sure that his sheep and goats are fed well like his children and keep big healthy dogs to guard the cattle (See Plate no.10). The journey involves

travelling together with family or clan members. Sometimes two or three families will migrate together along with their sheep and goats. There are many routes which the Bakarwals take for their seasonal migration to higher altitudes and back. The journey involves travelling together with family or clan members, generally called *dera*. The Bakarwals often mention,

*“voh kitna hara pahar tha. Itna shail aur thanda pahar. Voh dino bahut Allah ka barkat tha.”*

(Those were pleasant green mountains. So beautiful and cool mountains. Those days were filled with Allah’s blessings)

These words speak for most of the Bakarwals who often reminisce about the mountains as a refuge and providence. Though many of them still undertake their seasonal migration to the mountains today their experiences of the present is different from the past.

Lala Abdul, an elderly Bakarwal told me about the traditional routes his *kafila* undertook every year for the seasonal migration are as follows: they stay in Bambre for their winter months, then move up towards Shailsui, then to Rajouri, followed by Thanamandi, Ratansha, Chandimar, Chatapan, Pirpanjal, Doobjee, Shopian, Pulwama, Pampore, bypass, and then to Nishat where they spend their summer. Some of them also go to Dara, Hardigariwan, Kud Koolan, Sonamarg, Sarbal for their summer. These places are in the Kashmir valley according to him.<sup>22</sup> In terms of

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<sup>22</sup> Many scholars on Gujjars also mention the different routes that the Bakarwal undertake for their seasonal migration. Choudhary also mentions the summer homes of the Gujjars in Jammu region which is mostly in Sathal, Ladha Dhar, Sannasar, Sibgarh, Siyog, Girjan, Tat-Kuti Marg, Peshnu, Tosh Maidan, Noorastan, Pariastan, Yubastan etc. While in Kashmir valley the main pastures lie in the north, prominent among them being, “Tang-Dhar, Sikri, Dhud-Pathri, Simkooor, Kandal, Kal-Katha, Patan-Ghori, Chemrair, Tootan-Ali-Galli, Ganga-Bal, Choor-Nar, Neel-Gagar, Lus-

their migration, the *kafila*, which is a lineage of low range, plays a very important.

According to an elderly Bakarwal,

“ *Kafila.. jo hota hein jo hamara dera ek hota hein..ek kabila ka jo kafila hein voh ek sat chalta hein... bahut sare dera jo ekathe hote hein usko kafila kehete hein...mein aur hamare chachu ke dera ek kafila banjaye ga..*”

(*Kafila*, which is similar to our *dera*, one *kabila*'s *kafila*, moves together...when so many *dera* join together it is called *kafila*... I and my uncle's *dera* together makes a *kafila*)

The *kafila*, which consists of four to five *deras* moving together for their seasonal migration, passes through numerous routes and forests and towns (See Plate no.9).

The *deras* are family units consisting of married and unmarried children, which is their extended family. Dodhi and Desi Gujjars and Bakarwals are organized on the principle of *dera*. They say *kaaha dera dhalo ge?* (Where to put the *dera*?), which is generally what is commonly understood, but for them it *kis dera se ho?* (Which extended family do you belong to?). The idea of collective identity is linked with *dera*. Only members of the same *dera* journey together and share the same group identity. In other words the *dera* includes the people, their possessions and everything they move with. The socio-cultural and political aspects of their lives

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Pathri, Rambai, Lal Marg, Sadi-Marg, Muchali, Kurk-Bal, Gurez, Kilsa, Chitta-Katha, Gadsar, Bhug-Nar, Lach-Pather, Khilla Marg, Panda-Bal, Chander-Wadi, Aastan Marg, Tarni, Amar Nath, But Kollan, Sher- Nallah, Gomadi, Sokhni, Sain-Nallah, Dusmoon, Rang-Doom, Chiti-Batti, Dandard, Tehnyan, Riswan-Galli, Toot-Mar-Galli, Abdullah Ka Pather, Lus Walli, Bailan, Sinthan etc.” (2000: 87)

Khatana also mentions the seasonal Gujjar-Bakarwal migration and their oscillation. From November to mid-April they stay in the Siwaliks; from mid-April to July they migrate to ascend the *dhoks* (alpine pastures); from September to mid-November is the period of southward migration. Thus spring and autumn are the pronounced time cycles of oscillation, while the summer and winter months are the periods of stay in alpine (Dhok) and Siwalik pastures respectively (1992: 26).

revolve around their *dera*. The *kafila* movement is the movement of their cattle-sheep and goats and dogs. The *kafilas* have their own ancestral routes on which they continue to travel during their seasonal migration.

An elderly Bakarwal says,

*“Hamare buzoorgo ne yei route diya tha...hamare jaga allotmein hein garmi ka aur sardi ka bhi, koi doosra Bakarwal hamare allotment mein nahi jaye ga..jaha hamare buzoorgo ne banaye hein uuhsi route mein ham hete hein.”*

(Our forefathers have given us this route, we have our own allotments for our winter location, other Bakarwals cannot come to our allotments, we only take the route that our forefathers have given)

Not all Bakarwals go to the same location, and have their own routes which they have been travelling since many generations. But they still consider the tradition of seasonal migration important as they remember the routes they take precisely. The Bakarwals call their seasonal movement *radari*, which they undertake from the lower plains of Jammu to higher altitude like Sonamarg, Pahalgam and Warwan. Sometimes they make temporary settlements for themselves called *khotas* and for their flocks they make *bandis*. The ancestors of the contemporary Bakarwal are believed to have migrated into Jammu and Kashmir from the valleys of Allai and Kunhar now located in Pakistan (Khatana 1992, Rao 1995). Thus the Bakarwals differentiate themselves as *Allaiwal* Bakarwals and *Kunhari* Bakarwals. However, regarding their identity with the rest of them, they prefer to call themselves Gujjar-Bakarwal and that is how they are identified alongside the Gujjars in terms of their similar cultural and religious affinity<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Similar case had been earlier discovered by Rao (1995:2011) in her study of the Bakarwals who claim themselves to be Gujjar and the most probable reason is that

The *Allaiwal* Bakarwals consider themselves better than the *Kunhari* Bakarwals whom they consider as untidy while they generally perceive themselves to be orderly and well behaved compared to them. Shoukat an *Allaiwal* Bakarwal explains, “*our dressing style as well as Gojri usages differ*”. This shows their way of differentiating within their own ethnic community. Having spent time with both the groups of Bakarwals in their settlements, I could find certain differences in the everyday lives and lifestyle between the two groups. The *Allaiwal* Bakarwal family with whom I stayed was a close knit family with a male member as the head of the house, including his wife and three sons and their wives and grandchildren. For Bakarwal family means a nuclear family or an extended family which may be called joint family. They do not differentiate the family in terms of nuclear or joint. Their house was fairly better than the *Kunhari* Bakarwals, with their roof made of tin and cemented walls. Inside, they had access to dish T.V connection. They owned hundreds of sheep and goats and graze them in their traditional grazing lands nearby or far away on the mountains. Men are generally out with the flocks and other jobs. In fact Shoukat, who is the eldest son in the family, earns a living by teaching Urdu. The father makes all the important decisions about when to undertake migration and so on. In summers they all move up to the mountains of Srinagar passing Gulmarg towards Sonamarg and stay in tents. Shoukat joins them later after he has finished his work. They describe Sonamarg as a very beautiful place where apart from their cattle grazing and herding activities, they also get to earn extra income by engaging

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these groups often share the same ‘ecological marginal spaces’ and that they have ‘been more pastoral than agrarian’.

in activities like providing horse riding for tourists which can fetch them a minimum of Rs 500 per day. This gives a boost to the younger generation who are struggling with their traditional occupation and venturing out for better opportunities for themselves.

The *Kunhari* Bakarwals on the other hand claim that their lifestyle is a little different from the former even though both keep sheep and goats. Rafiq, the head of a family stays with his *kafila* which consists of his own family and five other families who are closely related. Rafiq's father Lal, is the head of the *kafila* and he has his sons and daughters and daughters-in-law and also his brother's family all living together. So every year when summer arrives they migrate together. Overlooking the beautiful Dal lake, Rafiq's household pitch their tents during the summer months. They stop there for a few weeks before proceeding for their summer location in Sonamarg which they say will be full of snow. According to them it is because of less availability of the grass and fodder that they go to Sonamarg. Sometimes Rafiq's wife and some of the women and children do not go with the flocks but migrate later by taking road transport with the children from Srinagar (Nishat). Men undertake the tedious job of migrating on foot in their traditional routes with their flocks. According to Rafiq, it is their ancestral route which they have been using for 200 years. Grazing in the recent years has been a problem as they have to compete with the locals who also keep cattle. There have been many cases of harsh treatment by the locals when they pass by with their flocks.

They often reminiscent of the past days by saying,

*“ pehle haam char char panch dera ek acchi jaga meidan dekte the, Laddadar se Udampur se upar..waha das din bhi rehte the bahut sare ghas*

*the, maal ke liye, pani bhi the ziada, zamine bahut the, aur abadi bhi kaam the.”*

(In the past, four five *dera* together used to look for a nice spot during the migration, beyond Laddadar and Udampur, we used to spend even up to ten days. There were plenty of grass for the cattle, water was available in plenty, land was more and people were less)

Much of their memories of experiences is fostered by this shared identity and physical movement. Trailing from the low lands in summers to the hills or mountains, for their cattle, is a routine activity which is an essential exercise for their survival. Several changes have taken place in the present times as many have started settling down, owned *pucca* houses and engaged themselves in other means of livelihood. There are even reputed politicians who are from the community. However, they still claim that large chunk of population still undertakes the seasonal migration with their cattle and have just the basic amenities for their living. Also, many poor Bakarwals work as bonded labourers for the wealthy Bakarwals who own hundreds of sheep and goats<sup>24</sup>. Majority of them live hard lives with even more problems relating to lack of grazing areas, increased living costs in the recent years, militancy and so on.

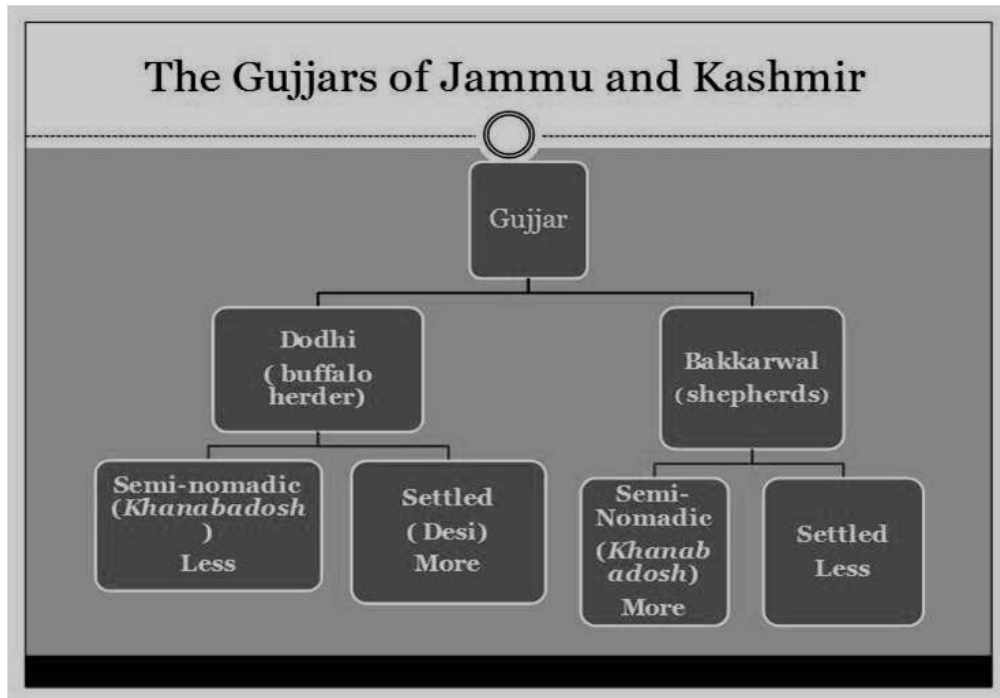
Figure 2 below gives the broad classification of the Gujjars into -The Dodhi Gujjar (buffalo breeding Gujjars) and the Bakarwals (the shepherd community). Within the Dodhi Gujjars, there are those who are semi-nomadic and those who are settled. While within the Bakarwal, there are those who lead a semi-nomadic life and those

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<sup>24</sup> Rao (1995) makes similar observations in her study.

who are settled. The Bakarwals claim that they are still a large number of them who undertake seasonal migration as compared to the Dodhi Gujjars.

**Figure 1: The Gujjar Classification**



**Gujjar and Bakarwal: Similarities and Differences**

As the above discussion reveals, scholars have made many classifications of Gujjars<sup>25</sup>. Scholars like Rao and Cassimir (1982) question the way Gujjars and Bakarwals are often represented together or apart from each other. They suggest that an *emic* and *etic* perspective along with careful analysis of field data as well as historical materials will help understanding the ethnic categorizations (*ibid*: 41). Gujjars and Bakarwals are considered one tribe, but in the anthropological sense,

<sup>25</sup> (see Rao and Cassimir 1982 , Khatana 1992, Sharma 2009).

they do not have a totally cohesive tribal structure. Because of linguistic, cultural similarity and history, these ethnic groups together may be called Gujjar as compared to “Kashmiri”, “Dogra”, or other Indian populations. The social structure of Gujjars and Bakarwals are quite similar even according to Rao and Casimir (1982:42). We find that Gujjar and Bakarwals are closely associated in terms of the economic, socio-cultural and political spectrum of their lifestyle.

Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars and Bakarwals can also be viewed as different groups. Scholars have pointed out that originally the Gujjars and Bakarwals of Central Asian origin were one tribe, but with the passage of time, the division of labour resulted in the Bakarwals taking up rearing of sheep and goats and becoming nomads in search of fodder for their herds the rest of the Gujjars reared buffaloes, and some slowly became sedentary, and took up cultivation of land wherever they found it vacant. The government also encouraged them to settle. Since the plains and fertile lands were already occupied by others, they had to settle down on hill tops, near forests and live on less productive land. The difference between the Gujjars and Bakarwals is in the vocational pursuits forced upon them by the turn of events. Otherwise, their language and *gotras-zat* classification are the same.

Most Gujjars agree that there is a huge difference in the lifestyle and occupation of the Dodhi Gujjar and the Desi Gujjar and the Bakarwal. There are many prejudices against each other despite all of them coming under the broad umbrella of Gujjars and under the same faith. Social interaction, especially intermarriage among the Gujjars and Bakarwals is prohibited. They prefer to maintain their traditional kinship relations intact so that they do not have to part with their share of cattle and grazing

allotments and other property. The difference in lifestyle seems to be the main barrier among them. The Desi Gujjars's lifestyle is considered to be better than most of the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars and the Bakarwals as they own land and are into various kinds of jobs. There are also many among them who are poor and live in the outskirts of the city, with few buffaloes. Even the Dodhi Gujjars have started keeping sheep and goats along with their buffaloes though in much lesser number as compared to the Bakarwals. The Bakarwals also keep a couple of cows and buffaloes for their own use of milk<sup>26</sup>. Bakarwals address the Dodhi Gujjars as *pahari bhes waale* meaning 'mountain buffalo keepers', and people who go to Laddadhar area. They do not have a very good rapport with them and often engage in quarrels with them over the grazing lands.

Both the Gujjars and Bakarwals follow the *bikrami* calendar, which is shown in Table

### 1. *Social Organization*

Clan/Zat Divisions: Gujjars can also be classified on the basis of their social organization like zat (jat) division. The zat refers to a unit of social organization among the Gujjars and Bakarwals (Rao 1988: 195-227). They often say, "Hum Gujjar zat hein" (we belong to Gujjar zat) or "Hum Bakarwal zat hein" (we belong to Bakarwal zat). Here the word zat is used to describe a coherent group

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<sup>26</sup> There is another kind of Gujjar community called *pahari* Gujjar or *van* Gujjars who lives on the mountains and also have summer and winter homes. They are also known as forest dwellers as forests are their source of livelihood and their very existences depend on them. Today *van* Gujjars are mostly found in Siwalik Hills area of Northern India. They have their winter base in the foothills of the Siwalik Hills and during summer they move to pastures in the mountains. Most of the *van* Gujjars are forest dwelling, semi-nomadic and cattle herding Muslims.

**Table 1: Gujjar classification of seasons (*mahina*)**

S. No	Month in Gojri	Approximate English Equivalent	Characteristics
1	<i>Bhasakh mahina</i>	April-May	It is the month that arrives just after winter ( <i>sardi</i> ) when summer ( <i>garmi</i> ) starts.
2	<i>Jeth mahina</i>	May-June	It is the season when they start migrating from cold to warmer place.
3	<i>Ar mahina</i>	June-July	This is considered to be the hottest season of the year which is difficult to bear with.
4	<i>Sawn mahina</i>	July-August	This month of the year is welcomed as it is this time when the monsoon starts.
5	<i>Pado mahina</i>	August-September	In this month, vegetables are ready to be harvested and eaten.
6	<i>Asu mahina</i>	September-October	This is the time of the year when the harsh summer retreats and winter begins.
7.	<i>Katak mahina</i>	October-November	This is the time of extreme winter.
8.	Manger mahina/ maagh	November-December	This is the continuation of the winter season which spreads over January and February.
9.	<i>Po mahina</i>	December – January	This time is still cold but it slowly retreats and the crops grow slowly.
10.	<i>Maagh mahina</i>	January-February	The final phase of winter is in this month
11.	<i>Phagan mahina/ phalgum</i>	February-March	This time winter is slowly retreating.
12.	Chetan mahina/ chetra:	March-April	Pleasant weather conditions with retreat of winter set in. Marriage festivity begins.

of people – the Gujjars as opposed to Dogra or any other Hindu caste. They use the word *jat* by pronouncing it as ‘zat’, to denote a group of people with a distinct identity such as Dodhi, Desi and Bakarwal. The term *jat* is derived from the word *jati* which has a broader meaning. According to Ghurye, the word *jati* is used to denote caste, which is a group whose membership is acquired by birth, etymologically meaning ‘something into which one is born’. It is occasionally used by ancient authorities as equivalent to ‘varna’ (1969: 176). The term *zat* is homologous to *jat* but its connotation is different. It does not refer to features of caste such as hierarchy, commensality and so on.

The main function of the *zat* is to regulate marriage, economic and migratory transactions. They use the term *zat* interchangeably with *gotra*. But for clarity, it may be said that *zat* is divided into several *gotras*. According to Sashi (1994) each *gotra* is the main kinship group among the Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh. The principal function of a *gotra* is with reference to herding, it helps in grazing efficiently and caring for the cattle and it is formed when a group of *deras* come together. Even among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir both *deras* as well as the *gotras* are considered important. Gujjars are divided into several *gotras* which is equivalent to a clan. Each clan has their own *mukkadam* (chief) and a council of *jirgas* (*biradari* panchayat) (See Plate no. 4 and Plate no.14). While the *mukkadam* controls the clan and looks after its needs, *jirga* adjudicates and administers justice in civil and criminal cases in which the members of the clan are parties<sup>27</sup>. They also differentiate

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<sup>27</sup> Tyagi writes that there are approximately 500 sub-castes or *gotras* within the Gujjars.” (2009: 241). The earliest reference to the *gotras* of the Gujjar is in the Sanskrit-literary endeavors, Samskarakaustubha (18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D), according to

several *biradari* within each *gotra*, exclusively on male line to specify that they belong to a particular *gotra* and *biradari* which can be equated to the lineage with several *deras*. Generally, *gotra* refers to people belonging to the same ancestor, household or related by blood. There are more than 30 *gotras* among the Gujjars and Bakarwals and they share similar *gotra* names. Some of these in Jammu and Kashmir are Poswal, Char, Bajran, Chechi, Khatana, Kasana, Baniya, Thikriya and Lodha.

The concept of *biradaris* is strong as it concerns with matters of marriage or death or settling disputes. It is the *biradari* which takes the initial decision to look into any matter of complaint pertaining to the community. Generally the accusations of people stealing buffaloes or emergence of conflicts regarding grazing of buffaloes in pasture lands by other people are brought to the notice of *jirgas*. If there is such a case in the village it is generally resolved by the *biradari* and they make a decision to which everyone agrees. The cases which become difficult for them to handle are handed over to the police. However, people prefer to resolve the case among themselves. In cases of elopement and marriage, elders in the family along with some other village elders decide the course of action.

In the case of marriage alliances the girl or the boy is supposed to marry from outside their father's *gotra*. Presently, marriage alliance are generally sought from

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which there are 1178 and most of which are territorial in origin (Guryhe 1969:232). The word *gotra* is actually connected to Hindu social system of social classification on the basis of some mythical ancestor or names of early places where they have settled or names of their founders. But Gujjar *gotras* are not connected to any mythical ancestor.

the maternal side where the mother's brother's (*mamu*) daughter or son (MBD/S) or mother's sister's (*mami*) son or daughter (MZS/D) is chosen. It could also be the father's sister's (*phuphi*) daughter or son (FZD/S). Among the Bakarwals, both marriage preferences are with cross cousins. So a man can marry his *phuphi*'s daughter (FZD) or *chacha*'s daughter (FBD) or *bu*a's daughter (MZD) or *mama*'s daughter (MBD). According to them, they have also started accepting parallel cousin marriages in the recent times.

The Dodhi Gujjars, practice maternal parallel cousin marriage besides paternal and maternal cross-cousin marriage. A man can marry either his *phuphi*'s daughter (FZD), *bu*a's daughter (MZD) or his *mama*'s daughter (MBD). Generally father's *gotra* is avoided for marriage alliance. The Gujjars say that earlier, they had hundreds of exogamous *gotras* which have recently become endogamous as a result of the Islamic tradition. It is a relic of Hindu social organization which is gradually fading away. In recent times, they practice cross-cousin marriages and even parallel-cousin marriages especially among the Bakarwal Gujjars. In addition to Islamic influence, this may be also because of unwillingness to put in more time and effort to look out for someone from outside the *zat*, and also to maintain family relations in terms of economic and social benefits.<sup>28</sup>

Daud, a Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjar from Sanasar elaborated the different Gujjar *gotra* that are found in Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and the other northern Indian

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<sup>28</sup> According to Rao (2011: 64) Gujjars claim to be a part of *biradari* which is a "corporate group" and generally refers to a large group of people who are related by consanguinal and affinal relations.

states where Gujjars are found. Accordingly, he classifies them as mentioned in Table 2.

**Table 2: Distribution of Gujjar Gotras in India**

S.No.	Gotra	Location	Religion
1.	<i>Lodha/Lodhe</i>	Jammu and Kashmir	Mostly Muslims
2	<i>Chechi</i>	In parts of Delhi	Both Muslims and Hindus
3	Chauhan	Delhi	Mostly Hindus
4	Khatana	Settled in Delhi	Mostly Muslims
5	Padhana	Parts of Rajasthan	Mostly Hindus
6	Thikriya	Gujarat	Mainly Hindus
7	Dedhar	Gujarat	Mainly Hindus
8	Paswal	Gujarat	Mainly Hindus
9	Baniya	Rajasthan and Gujarat	Mostly Hindus

## Conclusion

The above facts reveal the intricacies about Gujjar identity. Though often they present themselves as Gujjars as a single category and others also view them as a monotheistic group. They differentiate themselves into various categories. All the categories of Gujjars- ‘*dodhi Gujjar*’, ‘Gujjar-Bakarwal’, ‘*desi Gujjar*’ and ‘*pahari-Gujjar*’ etc., have overlapping characteristics in their culture, language and way of life. This makes the classification of Gujjars very complex. The socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of life play vital roles in such identity formations within the larger community.

We also find that the physical movements of the pastoral nomads are crucial not only for their livelihood but also shape the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of their individual and collective identity. The pastoral Gujjars’ relation to the *pahar*, *rasto*, *radari*, the *kafila* or the *dera*, give them a sense of identity, a tradition which is theirs and makes them unique. Though they do not migrate as frequently as before, the memories of their ancestral knowledge gives them a sense of heritage, without any official ownership.

In spite of the many changes in their lives today, the elderly members of the community still hold onto the utopia of the past around which their identity revolves. Modernity has intervened into their tradition. The state with its modern idea of progress aims to create ‘settled’, ‘stabilised’ societies so that it can control and govern them on the pretext of giving more freedom and access to the people. The idea of asking the pastoral nomads to settle down is a major intervention in their

tradition lifestyle and thus has fall outs. Nomads are nomads because they do not settle down at any one place as their collective identity and their collective sense of unity comes through this tradition of physical movement. In all the narratives above we find such strong memories of their nomadic life that they link with their collective identity which is an important strategy for their survival.

The narratives of the pastoral Gujjars also reveal their despair over the changing times and the struggles they are facing due to the intervention of the state. Some of the consequences are visible today like the constant threat to their traditional occupation, and problems like displacement, unemployment, poverty, marginalization, exploitation and so on. The consequence could be a situation where they are unable to cope with the changes, but ends up assimilating into the categories things which disturbs their true identity and the rich tradition that they boast about. These are evident in cases of sedentarisation without proper consideration of their socio-economic, political and security. As Mr. Rafiq, a Bakarwal puts it, “*we will not be able to adjust to sedentary life and we only know how to rear sheep and goats and so in other kinds of jobs we will fail.*” The way Khanabadosh Gujjars and Bakarwals are being scorned by the local population because of their lifestyle and association with cattle, also makes them feel excluded and unhappy. In reality, the physical movements gave them their identity, a sense of dignity and economic stability, besides recognition as a social group with a unique tradition. We find them deeply rooted to their environment and it is not just their shift from nomadic lifestyle to a semi-nomadic or sedentary lifestyle that has affected them but various other problems also, like displacement due to Indo-Pak tensions that has taken a toll on their lives.

This has affected the way they remember their spaces, culture and tradition. Thus, holding onto some aspects of their lives, especially the past they are nostalgic of, are some of the ways by which the community gathers a sense of pride and holds on to their identity, in this changing world which does not recognize them or feel for them.

## Chapter 4

### Being Sunni Musalman: The *Model for Religion*

*Islam is more than a religion; it is a “way of life” that encompasses all areas of human activity, private and public, ranging from the theological to the political. (Houben 2003:149)*

#### Introduction

The Gujjars as Muslims are expected to follow various religious norms and regulations, which can be understood from the ‘*model for*’<sup>1</sup> view, a model under which physical relationships are organized. Their ‘physical relationships’ in terms of religious living revolve around the basic teachings of Islam spread via the medium of several religious specialists. They shape the worldview of the Gujjars to a large extent and exert their control over them imperceptibly. This chapter describes several kinds of religious specialists that the Gujjars approach to find solution for the problems of spirits, sickness and fears of all kinds. They include *moulvi*, *pir*, *murid*, *wali* and *fakir*. There is no strict hierarchy among them. The recognition of a specialist is based on popularity rather than power or authority, and they are all Allah’s favored people or saints. The Gujjars revere all of them equally and seek their good will to approach Allah. The everyday activities in the non-symbolic relationships are tuned by the ideal norms of Islam (symbolic) so as to fit their lives in congruence with the expectations of their religion. In this regard, the focus will be on issues like how one can become a good Muslim via individual and collective

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<sup>1</sup> Model for aspect stresses on “the manipulation of the non-symbolic systems in terms of the relationships expressed in the symbolic...” (1973:93).

effort, and how they organise different lifecycle rituals that manifest their Muslim identity along with their ethnic practices.

In this context, the chapter will deal with the conceptualization of the worlds of the Gujjar followed by the sacred spaces and physical structures around which the construction of worlds and their impact on the people takes place. The religious life of the Gujjars is deeply connected to the religious specialists such as *moulvi*, *pir*, *murid*, *wali* and *fakir*. It also focuses on the different aspect of religious life, how individually and collectively the ideas of piety towards Islam are manifested individually and collectively.

### **I. Conceptualization of the worlds**

For the Gujjars, being Muslims the sacred authority begins with Allah, His Holy book the Qu'ran and His Prophet Muhammad. Humans are seen as agents that are created for Allah, to worship Allah and to serve Him. The Gujjars conceptualize their world in terms of *ruhani* (Spiritual) and *duniya/zindagi*(world of existence). Within the *ruhani*, there is Allah, *Shaitan* (Satan) and the spirits of different kinds called *tasruf* and in the *duniya* the human beings along with all other creation of Allah are included. Thus, Gujjars construct the world into two types: One of humans and the other of Allah. The latter has two components: paradise and hell. While the former is temporal, the latter is eternal. The world of Allah is invisible whereas the world of humans is visible. In the human world there are things created by God- humans, animals and plants, and in the world of Allah there are angels and other spirits. The humans are male and female and they produce children. As parents love their

children and are concerned about their needs and provide for them, Allah is passionate for His children, and he has provided everything that humans need. Just like how in the human world there is punishment for wrongs like when parents punish their children, Allah also punishes wrongdoers with eternal hell fire. In the manner how parents reward the children, Allah rewards the obedient humans by granting them paradise after death. The angels are the children or messengers of Allah at his service. These worlds are in constant interaction. *Shaitan* (Satan) opposes God and encourages people to violate the norms set by God. He is in the world and working through the people. The human world encounters another invisible world, the spirit world called *ruhani* that is in close interaction with the former. The bad spirits of the world are under the control of *Shaitan*. People should follow Allah by shunning the deeds that the *Shaitan* wants them to do. The spirits of the good people and bad people are also there in this world. The bad people through their bad deeds trouble people, similarly *Shaitan* and bad spirits also trouble the people. The good people will have to keep away from bad people, and similarly they have to keep away from *Shaitan* and the bad spirits. The spirits of the good continue to do good for the people and the spirit of the bad continue to trouble people till the final judgment.

The spirit world has been inhabited by beings like *jinns*, *jureal*, *pari* and so on. The everyday life of the Gujjars and Bakarwals is filled with encountering and dealing with such apparitions. Their worldview centers around binary categories like *jannat* and *jahanum*; Allah, the *farishtas* (angels) and *admi* (human beings) on one side and *Shaitan*, *jinns* etc., on the other side. Also, we find locating their lives around *accha*

(good) and *burra* (bad); *sawab* (reward) and *saza* (punishment); *zindagi* (life) and *maut* (death); *ruhani* (spiritual) and *aam zindagi* (ordinary), *pahar* (mountain) and *maidan* (plains) in their daily lives.

These two worlds are connected and interact with each other through various sacred structures, spaces and religious specialists. In the following pages an account of these are provided to reveal the religion of Gujjar as manifested in their every day experiences.

#### **a. Sacred spaces and sacred structures**

There are a variety of sacred structures which are considered important and to which a sense of piety is attached. The Gujjar's religion should be understood from their attitudes towards these structures and sacred spaces. Some of these sacred structures are: *masjid*, *dargah* and to some extent also the *qabar* (ancestral graves). The sphere of sacred spaces extends to areas outside these structures which could be residential houses, surroundings, spaces created temporarily during migrations etc. The sacred refers to something that is to be *kept apart* and is *forbidden* and gives a sense of religious feeling and reverence for the individuals and groups. The sacred structures and spaces are explained below.

#### **b. The Masjid: location, idea, surrounding**

The *masjid* forms an integral part of the Gujjars's belief system, as evidently in the presence of numerous *masjids* in different Gujjar settlements (See Plate no.15 and Plate no.16). It is important to note that these structures vary in size and shape in

different locations and partly depend on the social and economic profiles of the local inhabitants. The ones usually in the mountains, where the Dodhi Gujjars live during their summers, are generally small, and simple and do not have any taps or availability of water in the vicinity. While those in the settlements in the plains are bigger in size and have access to running water source. Also a *masjid* is managed in different locations by different caretakers. *Masjid* being a sacred space brings people together and there is awe in the mind of the worshippers who share the same space and time. The sacred character here is that this space provides them an opportunity to align themselves to Allah, even better, than when sitting at home and praying. It is a sacred space, and they shun the world to be with Allah for a specific time period, for *shajada* (worship) which is auspicious. The body of believers coming together in that space also enhance group solidarity that is very valuable in the sight of Allah.

While the *masjid* is the sacred space, the habitation is the profane space. Some time the space outside the *masjid* is used for secular or profane purpose like discussing the secular issues of individual family or local groups. Though one's house is part of the profane it does contain a sacred space. A room is kept separately for the purpose of performing *namaz* by those who are economically well off, generally the sedentary Gujjars, in their large houses. However, several of them use their bedroom for this purpose. I was informed that when someone in the family is instructed by a saint in the dreams or visions to maintain a separate room for him, a room is set apart where they can pray. This however is not a common phenomenon and many among them do not adhere to such beliefs. The Gujjars also are clear that they will never go to a Shia Masjid, while they can attend any *masjid* which belongs to the Sunnis. For them

the *masjid* is Allah *ke ghar* (House of Allah) and there is *sawb* (blessings) when they go there.

Also, after the prayers inside the mosque, they ‘come out’ and get involved with the real world, on several issues- socio-political or economic. In Rakh Baroti settlement, we find men gather outside the *masjid* often after their prayers where issues of political concerns are settled; cases of elopement, theft or other social issues are discussed. It also indicates that the most convenient time and place to solve their problems is within the premises of the *masjid* which is often a space for the discussion of the secular as well. Women are not involved in all these, which also indicate the kind of gender restriction in terms of accessibility to the religious space.

### **c. The Dargah**

The *dargah* is a sacred structure and a sacred space where the remains of a *pir* (Muslim saint) are kept. Some *dargahs* are built where the saint is believed to have breathed his last and therefore such *dargahs* do not contain the body of the saint (See Plate no.21). Not all the Gujjars visit the *dargahs* and in fact there is a great controversy regarding the visit to *dargahs* which has been discussed at the appropriate place elsewhere. In Jammu and Kashmir, we find sacred structures of different communities in almost every corner -Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, each with different symbols. Gujjars call any religious structure as *dargah* and in the sense they say Muslim *dargah* and Hindu *dargah*. A Muslim *dargah* will have green flags, green door post, and the saint’s relics will be covered in green cloth. The Gujjar settlements generally do not have any *dargahs* built in the vicinity. There are various

reasons for the mushrooming of *dargahs* over the years in the region. One explanation, the Gujjars give is that during the 1947 Indo-Pak separation, numerous people were killed on both sides among which there were good people also. The spirits of these good people come in the dreams of either Hindu or Muslim and then the *dargahs* are built for their sake by either Hindu or Muslim. If the dead man in the vision was a Muslim, then a *dargah* with all the Muslim symbols are built by Hindu or Muslim and is visited by both Muslims and Hindus. If the deadman was a Hindu, a shrine (which the Gujjars call as Hindu *dargah*) is built by the Hindu. The Gujjars emphatically say that they will never visit a Hindu *dargah* as it is against their Islamic beliefs, Hindus being idol worshippers.

For many of the Gujjars, visiting some popular local *dargahs* is an important part of their belief. They would visit *dargahs* atleast twice a month or for some even once every week. The reasons for visiting for most is to get relief from some personal problems, sickness etc. Women generally accompany any close male relative to go to the *dargahs*. Even among family members, there are those who do not revere it. So eventhough they accompany each other to go to the *dargah*, the ones who do not adhere to such beliefs stays outside and wait for the other person. Zareena, a Gujjar girl, was accompanied by her cousin (brother), who chose not to enter the *dargah* compound, when she entered the compound by removing her sandals like many others who came there. People from different backgrounds and religion visit the *dargahs*, some with flowers, garlands, sweets and other offerings. For Zareena, she did not carry any offering but she just covered her head with her *duppatta* and went inside. She stood next to the tomb of the saint and clasped her hand in the front to

offer prayers. She neither bowed down towards the tomb nor offered any incense or flowers, like others who did so and she came out after spending some 10-15 minutes inside. For her it is a *sawab* to be able to pray in the *dargah*. In Rakh Baroti settlement there is also a grave of a Muslim saint, whom the Gujjars revere and they offer prayers whenever required there ( See Plate no.22).

#### **d. Ancestral graves**

The Bakarwals, show great reverence to their ancestors. In this regard the rich Bakarwals have made beautiful epitaphs on the graves of their ancestors (Plate no. 20 and Plate no. 21). They organize annual celebrations centering on them. The belief in the *dagarh* is extended to these ancestral graves also if that person is connected to an important *pir* in the region. Such practices are common among the Bakarwals while few Dodhi Gujjars and Desi Gujjars adhere to such practice.

According to the Bakarwals, they go to the *Qabar* and they recite the *fatiha*<sup>2</sup> for the sake of the dead relative or ancestor who is in the *Qabar*. They pray that the *rooh* of the dead person will be accepted by Allah in *jannat*. According to them, anyone can visit the *Qabar*, and tie threads on the *Qabar*. I found many threads covering the graves and on the plants near the graves. They say that if there is any unfinished work or desires, they take the name of Allah, but the actual means to approach Allah is through the *wasila*<sup>3</sup>- these saints in the tomb to whose prayer Allah listens.

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<sup>2</sup> Surah Fatiha (The Opening) is considered as the most important Surah of the Holy Qur'an and no Muslim prayer is complete without it.

<sup>3</sup> A means to approach Allah.

Regarding such practices, they claim that it is strictly prohibited among the Wahabbis<sup>4</sup>, who are mostly Kahmiri Muslims and Dodhi Gujjars. Bakarwals claim that they are non-Wahabbis. Gujjars use the term Wahabbi mostly to indicate that they are those groups who do not venerate saints by going to dargahs.

#### **e. Migration and spaces**

The Gujjars revere some mountains to which they migrate for the summer because their ancestors discovered the routes to the high mountains and to which they can travel safely today. They believe that the mountains are inhabited by the *jinns* and all forms of spirits, who can even harm them. Thus there is both awe and fear with regard to such mountains. An important aspect they highlight is that as the mountains are very high places, and when they offer *namaz* in such high places, Allah listens to them better. They also say, “*Pahar ek pavitra jaga hein*” (the mountain is a holy place). They also claim that though there may be spirits like *jinns* and *jurreal*s in the *pahar*, *Shaitan* cannot be there. The idea that the mountains are a better place to be than the *sheher* (cities) which is in the *maidan* (plains) is strongly upheld by the pastoral Gujjars. They say “*shaitan jaha abadi ho, jaha bahaut sare log hote hein, usme hote hein*” (Satan dwells where there is more human population). They believe that *Shaitan* dwells with the people especially in the *sheher*. It is *Shaitan* who is after people’s lives and makes them do bad things. For the rest of the spirits, they claim

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<sup>4</sup> They are a puritanical Islamic group, founded by Muhammad Abd Al-Wahabb in Arabia in 1750. The Wahabbis who emerged in the Arabian Peninsula destroyed all the saint’s shrines that were found in Arabia and claimed that it risked the Islamic belief of oneness of God by promoting Shirk, Idol veneration, which was the greatest sin in Islam (Campo 2009: 44, 599)

that though they can harm people, they are different and not as bad as *Shaitan*. Their attributes will be discussed in the next chapter. During their seasonal migration, they often encounter many *dargahs* on the way. They stop and visit the *dargahs* and offer prayers for safe transit and protection for their cattle and family.

The sacred spaces and structures are usually managed by the religious specialists who are well versed in the sacred books. These are: *moulvi*, *pir*, *murid* and *fakir*. Their activities are discussed herewith to indicate their role in the construction of model of reality that the Gujjars are part of.

#### **f. Sacred Specialists**

##### **Moulvi: *The religious teacher***

*Moulvi* is a very important religious specialist in the community. He conducts prayers, attend to life cycle ceremonies and also teach people from the religious texts. However, in matters regarding healing and curing diseases, *moulvi* does not play any significant role. He prays and gives advice on the matter but does not resort to any immediate act of healing or immediate solution to the problems. A *moulvi* may have his own family or choose to stay single and serve the community. The *moulvi's* day begins very early with announcing the *azan* at around 4:30 am from the mosque, followed by various other engagements in the day ranging from child naming ceremonies and counselling people on family matters or disputes to solemnizing marriages and conducting funeral rituals. He keeps record of the births, deaths and marriages in the community.

He is an important personality with whom especially the Gujjar men share their immediate concerns. *Moulvis* are often referred to as *para hua*, meaning ‘have read’ or ‘knowledgeable’, based on their ability to understand and teach the Qur’an. They are also recognised as spiritual mentors and guides. They sport long beards, and wear white *kurta* and *pyjama*<sup>5</sup>, a *pakri* (turban) and carry prayer beads in their hands, and move around the settlements. People welcome him to their homes and converse with him about different issues. The *moulvi* is recognised as an *alim*, a scholar, whom the community respects. The *moulvis* often lament about the apathy of people towards God in the present days. Most of them say,

*These days people are busy earning money and there is no time even to make it for the prayer in the mosque. Also, there is so much hatred and lying prevalent among the people and we encourage them to shun from all the evil ways.*

Another popular complaint is that these days, people are more inclined towards secular education. *Moulvi* Rehem a Gujjar, says,

*Gujjars these days want their children to go to school for a better life so they send them to secular schools and only a few turn up in the madrassa.*

*Moulvis* that minister to the Gujjars are mostly non-Gujjars. They come from other ethnic or regional backgrounds. For instance, the *moulvi* in Rakh Baroti Gujjar settlement is from Bihar and comes from the Barelwi<sup>6</sup> school of thought. He is given

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<sup>5</sup> and in some cases green *kurta* and *pyjama* (depending on his affiliation to *madrassa*)

<sup>6</sup> A movement within the Sunni Islam school of thought called the Hanafi originating from Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. The Barelwis stressed the importance of venerating saints and seeking intercessions from saints for the benefit of the living (Bowen 2012:29)

a place to stay and he preaches in Urdu and not Gojri in the mosque. They stress the importance of Arabic as an important language which every Muslim should know. *Moulvis* also teach Arabic and Urdu to little children in the mosque to enable them to read the Qur'an, which is considered important for any Muslim. *Moulvi* Sher Ali, from one of the Gujjar settlements mentions,

*Religious knowledge (mazhabi talim), is what we teach from the Qur'an. Parents encourage their children to learn, as they want them to get an understanding about God and how to be a good Muslim.*

There are also several life cycle ceremonies where the *moulvi's* participation is important. In the case of the child naming ceremony, immediately after child birth, the *moulvi* is summoned to officially welcome the new born baby. He holds the infant and whispers the *azan* in the ear. This takes just a few minutes and only then the child is breast fed. The prayer offered is considered to be a *sunnat* (desirable/blessing) as they begin life hearing God's word first. It is also a way of telling the child that he/she has entered the world. The family offers food to the *moulvi* and the ritual ends. Only then the child is given a name by the elders of the family.

*Moulvis* also conducts marriages, commonly called *shaadi* or *nikah*. His role is important as the marriage is ultimately approved through him as he performs the religious ceremony, *nikahnama*. In this ceremony, along with the *moulvi* who sits with the groom, there is a *vakil* (advocate) and two *gavaah* (witness). The *vakil* approaches the bride first along with the two witnesses, and he reads the *Kalimah*<sup>7</sup> to

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<sup>7</sup> Declaration of faith

the bride. Before that, he asks her father whether he agrees to give his daughter in marriage to the boy. To this, the father gives a positive reply by saying “*kubool hein*” (Yes I agree). Then the *vakil* meets the the girl and reads her the *Kalimah* in the presence of the two witnesses. The *vakil* and his witnesses then inform the *moulvi* of the proceedings. Finally, *moulvi* goes to both the groom and the bride for their final approval of their agreement to the marriage and when they agree saying “*kubool hein*” (Yes I agree), he approves the marriage and whisper a prayer.<sup>8</sup> The marriage function thus concludes with a feast for all the guests.

After few days of marriage, the bride returns home to her parents and stays with them for few months and sometime for a year until she attains her puberty, after which she prepares to finally leave the parents. The Gujjars perform the ‘sending off ritual of the girl by organizing a small gathering of friends and families in the settlement. The *moulvi* also is invited for prayer, and he recites verses from the Qu’ran and offers the blessings of Allah on her so that she can get *barkat* (blessings) as she starts her new life with her new family. The role of *moulvi* is also important especially when a person dies.

### **Pir**

The specialist who is considered efficient for handling problems related to the supernatural realms is the *pir*. He is someone who is close to God besides having knowledge of the Qur’an. Though there are disagreements on the institution of *pir*, as it does not conform to Islamic ideology, several Gujjars in reality visit *pirs*. The

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<sup>8</sup> Generally among the Dodhi Gujjar, we find the approval of *nikaahnama* verbal, and no papers were signed during my field work observations.

Gujjars believe that the ability to contact or control the power of the spirits by negotiating or finding favour of Allah to control them, is in the hands of few people like the *pir*. The Gujjars show profound reverence for the *pir* and consulting the *pir* is a common practice among them. There are two types of *pirs*: those that are dead and whose shrines are referred to as *dargah and* those who are alive and meets people in their chambers in their residences. A *pir* has sound knowledge of the Qur'an and uses it mainly for healing purposes and not to formally teach the Qur'an like a *moulvi*. He is more concerned with the people's problems, which may be physical or mental ones.

There are several symbolic references made of the *pir*, which shows Gujjar's attempts to harness the supernatural powers. These are : *pir* as Allah's beloved or friend, *pir* as the *wali or raasta* (guardian or a way to reach Allah), *pir* as a healer and provider, *pir* as someone who is 'veiled' for now but not dead, and *pir* as the 'medium' of help and not the 'source' of help etc. These are discussed in the following pages.

### ***Pir: wali***

The Gujjar uses the word *wali* to refer to the *pir*. It means guardian, the one who stands on behalf of the people before God. For the Gujjars, the *pir* is at the right hand of Allah and act as a mediator between men and God. They call him *Allah ke pyare* (God's beloved), someone who has immense devotion towards Allah during his lifetime. Therefore Allah too in return showers his love and listens to his petitions. According to Gujjars, whenever people call out to the *wali*, his *rooh* will find the person and help as the *rooh* of the *wali* is capable of doing. The *wali's rooh* is

considered to be good and cures the people when they pray to him. A simile that they use is *wali* as a sword. Like a sword's power when it is taken out from its sheath, and returns only after accomplishing the intended task, a *wali* is also powerful when its *rooh* comes out of the grave where it lay. Since the *pir* is close to Allah, many of them believe that he can get them a place in *jannat*.

**Pir: A Raasta**

The *pir* is considered to be a *raasta*, a road, which links man with God. The reason is that no ordinary man can reach Allah except through specific individuals like the *pir* whom Allah has called for this purpose. The *pir* has special healing powers from an early age; for since his life is clean and good, God uses him. Healing requires knowledge about the disease, but in case of the knowledge relates to spiritual knowledge and power, and the diseases are with reference to attacks of bad spirits causing sickness. He has the spiritual knowledge of controlling or driving away the bad spirits. In this sense *pir* is the right path to reach the destination. Going to a doctor when one is attacked with a spirit is not taking a right path. Rather the right path is approaching a *pir*. The *pir* can give advice if one can seek help from a doctor if the disease is not caused by a spirit. Having knowledge about the right road is necessary for the travelers including the nomads or cattle tenders to go to the desired place or return home. One can be misled by a wrong road. In this sense, *pir* provides the correct road to reach Allah. This conception is important when there are rival religions and different interpretations of the sacred text.

**Pir: personal Assistant**

Some of the Gujjars often use the illustration of a Minister and his Personal Assistant (PA) to understand about the *pir* and Allah relationship. In the secular world, a PA to a Minister functions as a mediator between the Minister and the rest; without the help of the PA it is not possible to meet the Minister. The PA keeps a record of the itinerary of the Minister, and also provides correct information about the Minister. Sometimes the PA can influence the Minister to decide in favour of a person whom the PA likes due to their intimate personal relations besides the official relation. In some cases he could be the confidant of the Minister.

***Pir: A person in Uniform***

Many Gujjars visit *pirs* to be healed from sicknesses. But Alam, an elderly Gujjar says about the *pir*, “*They are those who are ready in their vardi (uniform) and ready to meet the world*”. This statement throws light on an important conceptualization that the dead *pir*, is not dead to her because he is ‘ready to meet people in his uniform’- which also means that the ascribed role of the *pir* is of someone who is ready to give his service as a police or soldier in uniform whenever people wants him or at the command of the officer. Gujjars say the underlying belief in a visit to a *dargah* of a *pir* is that the *pir* is not dead but he is alive, just ‘distancing’ himself from the world, and becoming a *gaer* (stranger), to the world<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> This idea is closer to Sufi philosophy, where the *duniya* (world) is a veil concealing the divine; ascetic practices aim to remove the veil from the heart in order that the divine light might be perceived. (Alvi 2013:185).

### **Pir: an Electric line**

Lala Abdul Rouf, an elderly Bakarwal uses the example of an electricity transformer to explain the role and function of a *pir*. Standing outside his house which is on the top of a small valley of a thick jungle in Jindral, he could see a number of electric poles connected to a transformer stretching away from each other at intervals.

Pointing to the electric poles, he explains,

*Like the electricity transformer which has the tar (electric lines) connected to pass the current which eventually at the other end gives light, likewise a pir is like tar through which the light of Allah or the favour of Allah reaches the people. And it connects the people to Allah. Of course our prophet is the person closest to God and then the pir.*

This very expression makes clear the mediatory role of a *pir*. This is why they are devoted to *pirs* and accept the institution of *pir*.

From the above, the Gujjar's conceptualization of *pir* can be inferred. This conceptualization can be located in between binaries. There are Allah's friends and foes or whom Allah likes or favoured ones and those whom Allah does not like or the unfavoured ones because they do not follow the ways of Allah. In this respect the ordinary person falls in the category of the disliked or unfavoured category whereas the *pir* is in the category of the friend or favoured person; he stands between Allah and the disliked/unfavoured/ordinary person. The *rasta* has two points: starting and ending points. These two points are connected by the path. These two points stand for Allah as the end point and the ordinary person as the starting point, the plane can be interpreted as that of a slope where a person has to go up, and *pir* is the path that connects both the points. The illustration of the electric wire is very similar to the analogy of *rasta* in which Minister represents Allah while *pir* represents the PA that

mediates between Minister/Allah and the ordinary person. The PA takes the mediatory role of presenting the ordinary person that has come to meet the Minister seeking a favour. The role of PA is very important because he could be either a facilitator or a detractor; so it is important to maintain good rapport with the PA and be in his good books because without him it will not be possible to meet the Minister who needs the PA's appraisal of the individual. In both analogies there is a hierarchy, and the electrical transformer and Minister is the source from where the power flows down.

The healer and the healed are binaries in which the healer is Allah himself; the *pir* is only facilitator the healing of the people, similar to the case of source of help and the medium of help. The healer i.e., *pir* mediates between Allah and people. The *pir* is in the veil i.e., he is neither completely dead nor alive. Thus, it leads to the conceptualization where two worlds or two kinds of beings intersect, and in the intersectional space there is *pir*. As anthropologists have already pointed out that intersectional space is either sacred or dangerous. In this particular case, it is sacred.

### **The Living Pir: The 'medium' of help and not the 'source' of help**

The living *pir* gives audience to the people that visit him in his chamber at his residence. They say that *pir* is revered but not worshipped and the glory goes to Allah only. In other words, they make supplications to the *pir* but not actually 'to the *pir*' but Allah. It is intriguing because on the one hand they seem to give credit to the *pir* while on the other they are not ready to acknowledge that they are actually dependent on the *pir* for their various needs. What is to be noted is the importance given to the *pir*, and his necessity as a mediator. Accordingly, when one goes to the

*dargah* they are not supposed to perform *kaidah* (worship) which involves bowing down but can only read the *namaz*, *durood sharif*<sup>10</sup> and *Kalimah*. They emphasise that *kaidah* (rule or law) is in *Allah's* hand and it is important to give respect to *Allah* and not to the *pir*. They have to utter this prayer saying,

*Pir baba...you are Allah's chosen elder, listen to our prayers. Take our prayers, to Allah and fulfil our heart's desire.*

This petition involves requesting the *pir* to get their prayers answered. People generally go to the *dargah* of a *pir* with various prayer petitions and requests and also offer things in the name of the *pir* to God as offerings. They are not supposed to offer any flowers or things on the shrines, but in practice, many give offerings. The popular *pirs* who are alive and meet people on everyday basis, ranging from ten to hundreds, are found commonly in Jammu and Kashmir. Some are not so popular but do get people on a regular basis. Shamujjuddin is a *pir* in Jammu, and Gujjars and other Muslims visit him regularly. When asked how the *pir* treats people who are sick, he comments,

*Allah is the maker of all things and human beings are created first. Everything is made by Allah, even the body. People are Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs but all are human. People are not bad but it is the bad things that make men bad. Spiritual healing/ruhani ilaaj is important as it heals people suffering from all bad things. This treatment is not a medical healing but a spiritual healing. God heals the people and I just pray for them. I am just in this system of healing people by praying.*

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<sup>10</sup> invocation citing phrases to complement Prophet Muhammad

He does not take the full credit of the healing activity, even after giving the *tawiz*<sup>11</sup>, laying his hands on the patient, whispering, and uttering some Qur'anic verses in a particular intonation to the patient. People are generally told to wear the *tawiz* which contains few verses (*ayahs*) of the Qur'an or drink water containing the paper with *ayahs* written, that can cure their problems. Many, however, do not actually know how to recite the verses and also cannot understand the meaning of the verses. So instead, people follow the *pir*'s instruction faithfully by tying the piece of paper to their neck. Many Gujjars also believe that all these techniques were earlier used by their Prophet Muhammad. This particular *pir* lives in a good house with several rooms and few servants, and is busy with several people every day.

The general attitude towards a *pir* is that people appreciate and acknowledge him to be more close to the spiritual realm, and thus they approach him, whether in the grave or in person as in the case of *pirs* like Mian Bashir and Shamujjuddin. Their *mehnat* (labour) during their lifetime has enabled them to draw closer to God. Their hard work refers to the time they spent, prioritizing God's desires by meditating and reading the Qur'an, and *pakh zindagi* (living a holy life) not giving way to worldly pursuits like going after money or fame or other desires of the flesh. We find many Gujjars with lots of empathy for the *pir*, especially of Wangat Sharif<sup>12</sup> about whose life they have developed strong sentiments, as a result of which they have continued

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<sup>11</sup> A locket containing verses from the Qu'ran.

<sup>12</sup> Wangat Sharif is in Kashmir

their attachment with his successors<sup>13</sup>. Such kind of tradition, leads to a legacy, a system of power relations that get transferred from one generation to another, a tradition that is kept alive by remembering the ancestor, who had a connection with the divine. This is not something that the followers might agree with, for according to them, the appointment of the *pir* is a divine plan, and ordinary people do not know how it exactly happens or need not know at all.

Some Gujjars argue that that the institution of *pir* is very much within the fold of Islamic teachings and *mazhabi kitab* (religious book). The concept of ordinary world vis-à-vis the spirit world; ordinary men vis-à-vis spiritual men; the seen vis-à-vis the unseen; the helplessness vis-à-vis the help are the dominant binaries related to faith and everyday life of Gujjar Muslims. The idea that ordinary men are not capable of reaching out to Allah, and only few ‘good’ men can present their requests before God, is the basic premise on which the Gujjar structure their every day experiences, problems and solutions.

### ***Murid*: Disciples of the Pir**

Murid are the disciples or followers of the *pir*. A Murid is also known to be someone committed to the *pir*. They are also called *chele* and are found not just in India but also abroad. They listen to the advice of the *pir* and learn from the *pir* about *ruhani* and healing practices. Abdul Rouf, an elderly Gujjar Bakarwal said that

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<sup>13</sup> One of the most revered living *pir* today among the Gujjars is Mian Bashir, whose father and grandfather are entombed at the Shrine in the Wangat Sharif, which is in Kashmir. He is a Sufi *pir*, and is highly popular not only among the Gujjars, but also non Gujjars. People from different religious backgrounds visit him for guidance, cure from different health problems.

he is a *murid* of Pir Mian Bashir as mentioned above for his grandfather Baba Hajji Alam Din Bokra (from Jindral, Tehsil district) was one of the *murids* of Pir Mian Bashir's grandfather who was a famous *pir*. People also pay reverence to his grandfather as he was the *murid* of the *pir*. It is observed especially among the Bakarwal men who follow a particular popular *pir*, that they tend to associate themselves with a *pir* and call themselves as the *pir's murid* so as to gain favour from Allah and also get respect from men.

This linkage with a socially and religiously influential person also speaks of the 'power' relations within them. The *pir* with the knowledge of the Qur'an as well as the supernatural is able to exert more influence over the rest of the group, who takes his views at face value. The *murid* in return also get benefitted indirectly as people give importance to his status of being a close associate of the *pir*. It also takes years of training to be working with the *pir*. They justify the importance of their profession saying that like in the days of their prophet Mohammad, when there were so many with him wherever he went, they are practicing the same in the present times. The *pirs* have followers from far and wide, including the *murids*, on whom he puts his complete confidence and responsibility. People take the *tawiz* from the *murid* if the *pir* is not available for communication. The *murid* will be mostly men and they are all dressed in plain clean *kurtas* and *pyjamas* and makes sure that the *pir* is not disturbed or overburdened.

## **Fakir/ Wali**

Fakirs are those who wander from place to place taking God's name and people give or dole out alms and food to them<sup>14</sup>. Many Gujjars think that *pir* and *fakir* are same. The general understanding, however, is that they are ascetic itinerant religious mendicants living on alms i.e., dependent on Allah for survival. An elderly Gujjar says,

*Pir and fakir are generally men who are alive and there are those in the shrines who have 'veiled' themselves from the world. In other words, people think that the pirs in the shrines are not dead but their spirit/rooh lives and also the fakirs who are generally ascetics live 'away' from the worldly cares.*

According to *moulvi* Daud, an elderly Gujjar, *fakirs* can be of different types. There are those like Sai Baba, a Hindu saint and even *Isa* (Jesus) in Islam and Christianity who traveled from place to place and met people. *Pir* and *fakir* are believed to possess special powers from God; however, the difference is that a *pir* has followers while a *fakir* does not. Even among the various religious specialists they consider a *musalman pir* to be the strongest. There are lots of evidence given by people of being healed properly by Muslim *pirs* for their sickness and so even intense cases like spirit possession. They also illustrate that *pir* and *fakir* are *khuda ke dost* (friends of Allah). According to them, both *pir* and *fakir* gives *ruhani* (spiritual) *taleem* (teaching). Their spiritual knowledge is something which can 'connect people with God'. Many people also see *wali* as a *fakir*. No one can identify a *wali* and his motives; however, a *wali* can identify the thoughts and attitude of a person from

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<sup>14</sup> Faqir is an Arabic term, often used in Sufism to refer to someone who is humble and has renounced the world in order to follow the Sufi path (Campo 2009:192)

outside. Unlike *pirs*, *fakirs* are dressed shabbily in rags and they go from house to house chanting the name of God and asking people for food. Not all *fakirs* can be a *wali* but a *wali* can be a *fakir*<sup>15</sup>. According to them, the *fakir* who is also a *wali* does not beg. They revere the religious specialists but keep the *pir* at the higher level as they believe that the *pir* has the closest connection with God.

It is important to note the hierarchical system here as *pir* is seen to be more influential than a *fakir*, even though both are considered as Allah's friends, or devotees of *Allah*. The *pir* is revered more than a *fakir*, because of his knowledge of the divine and since his contribution in the socio-economic and political lives of the people is more than that of the latter. The *fakir* on the other hand has nothing to contribute at least in the present days, and hardly do we find one these days as the Gujjars say.

## II. Religious Practice

Muslims everywhere are to abide by the five pillars of Islam<sup>16</sup>. Most of their everyday life cycle rituals clearly reflect a religious sense as well as the touch of tradition and custom<sup>17</sup>. As mentioned above, religious symbols can be praying five

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<sup>15</sup> One of the informants highlighted about a *wali* in Pakistan who was also a *fakir* which is rare.

<sup>16</sup> Also called (*Arkan al -Islam*) which consists of *shahada* (declaration of faith), *salat* (prayer), *sawm* (fasting), *hajj* (pilgrimage), and *zakat* (charity). See Guindi (2008:118). Gujjars use different terminologies like *shahada*, *namaz*, *roza*, *hajj* and *zakat* respectively.

<sup>17</sup> As in the words of Geertz, "religious symbols work to create and sustain belief", which is expressed in ritual (1973:100).

times a day, recitation with the aid of beads done especially by the elderly members of the community, recitation of the *Kalimah* and so on all if these contributes to the ritualistic part of religious practice and symbolic expression of piety. The postures of *namaz* for instance are not only certain symbolic meanings but also the person who regularly performs *namaz* is a symbol of piety. That person is looked up as a pious person. The practice of religion in their everyday lives can be examined into through two categories: a) Individual acts b) Activities performed in a group.

#### **a. Individual activities**

Home is where religious socialization begins for every individual. The father or mother shows their children how to perform the *namaz*, gets their children enrolled in a local mosque for classes in Arabic and helps learning the Qur'an. From reading the *Kalimah*, to offering *namaz*, to observing *roza* (fasting) on certain days, visit to mosque by men, paying of the *zakat*<sup>18</sup>, we find their lives centre on these activities. Though the visit to Mecca and offering of the *zakat* every month is mandatory for every Muslim, many are unable to fulfill their religious obligations. The reason being that they are poor and do not have enough to give to others; hence it is an impossible dream to travel to Mecca because of their condition. Their everyday lives are surrounded with rituals which they are obliged to follow as faithful Muslims. The rituals are centered not only on the individual family but also involve the rest of the community<sup>19</sup>. Tradition and religion are more or less interlinked as in the case of

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<sup>18</sup> Obligatory charity giving to the needy and the poor either in cash or in kind.

<sup>19</sup> Anthropologists generally use ritual to mean action and beliefs in the symbolic order without reference to the commitment or non-commitment of the actors.

other Muslim communities including the Gujjars. Faith is something more than a physical act of displaying piety through rituals, but of a deep inner psychological experience beyond a physical measurement. If one wants to understand faith through rituals it is only a partial exploration of the subject yet it is also not unimportant. Durkheim (1912) advocated that rituals both reflect and support the moral framework underlying social arrangements. He saw rituals as a representation of social structure. Indeed even in the case of the Gujjars following the ritual makes one a true *musalman* and every activity starting from their life cycle rituals centering on their family and community as a whole is influenced by religion. Some of the rituals, which are necessary to be a Muslim, are as follows.

#### **Azan: First words of life**

Whenever a child is born, immediately, the *azan*<sup>20</sup> is recited in both the ears of the child as stated earlier. It is believed that when the child hears the message of the Qu'ran, and the name of Allah, he/she comes to the track of becoming a Muslim. A child after it is born is immediately cleaned and wrapped in a clean cloth and the elder of the family lifts him/her up and sounds the *azan* in both sides of the ear. This is considered as a *sunnat* and pleasing to Allah. They also believe that by doing this act, the child is protected from any evil influences and diseases. This activity

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(Douglas 1970:2). As in the words of Durkheim where he says that religious representations are collective representations expressing collective realities. Rituals on the other hand are “ways of acting” generated only within assembled groups, which help to “stimulate and sustain or recreate certain mental states in these groups.” (1912: 11).

<sup>20</sup> Refers to the Muslim call for prayer, mentioning the greatness and uniqueness of Allah and also His messenger, Prophet Muhammed.

happens within the family and if the family wants, sometimes the *moulvi* is invited to whisper the *azan* in the child's ear. They celebrate in a small way by distributing sweets in the neighbourhood and also to guests who visit them.

### ***Khatna to be a Muslim***

For the boy child circumcision is an important part of becoming Muslim. It is *khatna* among the Gujjars, where a boy child undergoes the circumcision within a year of his birth. The Gujjars celebrate this ritual elaborately, where on the specified day, when the boy is finally ready, a large number of relatives and neighbours are invited. Men and women sit outside the house, whereas the boy is taken inside the room where the circumcision activity is carried out by a *nai* (barber), who is specialised for the task. He is a non-Gujjar generally and has a fixed rate for this work sometimes even charging thousand rupees for that one sitting. Though the Gujjars feel that they are being exorbitantly charged, they pay to the *nai* as demanded as this ritual is considered one of the most important rituals which Islam directs them to do<sup>21</sup>. For them it is a *sunnat*. The Dodhi Gujjars mentioned that sometimes they give away buffaloes instead of cash for the work done. Makku an elderly woman comments,

*We cannot be a musulman without doing it, so we have to pay and please them though it is expensive.*

The reason for such elaborate ritual and celebration is also because they believe that only after performing this ritual one becomes a 'Muslim'. They sacrifice a sheep or a goat or even a calf in the name of the child and pray for his long life and blessings.

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<sup>21</sup> This activity is actually a Sunnah (the Prophet's recorded words and action) which people are supposed to follow.

Sweets made of *goor* (jaggery) are distributed to friends and relatives and lunch is also served. People also give cash or gifts to the child.

## **Namaz**

**Call to Prayer:** The sound of the *azan* every five times prepares them for *namaz*<sup>22</sup>. People quickly turn to a divine calling by keeping aside all the mundane activities for the important activity of prayer, a time to connect with the divine<sup>23</sup>. At this time, women and girls quickly put on their *duppata*, elderly women hush the younger ones to stop talking and everyone takes their time to rush for prayer. Women perform *namaz* at home. It is generally done by their bedside, or in an inner room which is generally kept clean, or in case of summer homes in high altitude mountains they even pray in the open space near a water source where they can first clean up themselves. Women at homes take turns to perform the prayer, one cooks while the other prays and later exchange their places to ease their household chores. Men on the other hand are not caught up as women and perform the ritual and then go back to their work. It is not that the physical activities in the Gujjar settlements come to a standstill but the attitude of the people towards that particular moment change. Dodhi Gujjars tending the buffaloes, be it in the high mountains of Sanasar valley or in the plains of Jammu, stop their chores and immediately proceed for the *wuzu*<sup>24</sup> before

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<sup>22</sup> The pedagogical techniques of Islam involve stressing on listening; recitation and memorization accompanied by patterned gesture and also practices of erudition and pious contemplation. (Hirschkind 2006:14).

<sup>23</sup> Similar is the case of sermons which also attunes and orients the sense to a “divinely ordered world.” (ibid: 37)

<sup>24</sup> Pronounced as ‘Wah-Zoo’, is a ritual washing before the commencement of prayer.

their prayers in the mosque or in their respective sacred spaces of their houses. An elderly Gujjar mentions,

*We are commanded not to miss the namaz until we die. There is no excuse for anyone. It cannot be avoided except for some exceptions like sickness, travelling etc.*

Bakarwals who are migrating, and cannot access a mosque or water to clean them, would often say that they do their *namaz* in their hearts by remembering Allah. It is only when they get the opportunity to perform the *namaz* physically with all the bodily postures, that they do it. Otherwise, remembering Allah in thoughts is also acceptable according to them. Doing the *namaz* is an integral part of the faith as Muslims and the Gujjars obediently follow the ritual. It is an act done in isolation, which though not done as a physical collective every day, is but done collectively in their minds thus asserting themselves as Muslims. There is a 'collective mental consciousness' that people have, where they know that every Muslim is performing the ritual of *namaz* at a particular time of the day<sup>25</sup>. At the same time there is also the weaving of the sacred and the ordinary<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> As El Guindi observes, *namaz* in Muslim world is to be, "the obedience to God, following "the right path" carved by God, belonging to the community of believers and about Islam's rhythm. Once in a cleansed state, facing the appropriate direction, and in proper dress code a Muslim person can pray anywhere according to Islam's time pattern." (2008:124)

<sup>26</sup> (*Ibid* :146)

### **The ritual cleansing activity**

For any Muslim, ceremonial cleansing is very essential and right from the morning namaz until the evening they maintain ritual cleansing of their body. Muhammad Israel, an elderly Gujjar said that *wuzu* is the systematic ceremonial cleaning of the body parts that one has to do before the *namaz*. Zarina a fifteen year old Gujjar girl enthusiastically narrates,

*This tradition of cleansing has been taught to me by my father especially. He always told me to keep in mind the observances of Qur'an and hadiz for my life. Without proper cleansing of the body we are napak/impure or unclean with which we cannot call unto God.*

Men, women and children, atleast by the time they attend school and learn about the basics of Qur'an, abide with the ritual cleansing. The following steps are involved in doing *wuzu*. First comes the washing of hands upto the elbows three times. After which one has to clean the mouth three times with water. After that, the nose has to be cleared three times with water. Then water is taken in the hands and they perform the *masak karna* which involves ritual cleansing of the head by using both the palms of the hands to massage the head by rubbing the head three times. After that they pour water on the feet and clean them. After all these steps they go into their prayer spaces, which may be inside the room or outside, where they prostrate, kneel and stand on and off as they read out the *Kalimah*. All these steps are believed to have been mentioned in the *Hadith*<sup>27</sup> and practiced by the early followers of Prophet

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<sup>27</sup> The sacred sayings of Muhammad, handed down by oral tradition and finally written down.

Muhammad. There is also no written declaration in the Qur'an to perform five times *namaz* and on how and when to pray. It was only because of Prophet's followers who saw the Prophet's way of life and started following his footsteps. Many Qur'anic researchers also believe that such ritual of praying five times was carried out even before the Prophet came to prominence.

The idea of hygiene is important when it comes to undertaking religious activities like the *wuzu* and also before entering the mosque where people wash themselves and put on their clean *kurta pyjama* and keep their shoes outside the mosque before entering the sacred space. Islamic hygiene requires certain washing and bathing practices that for practical purposes are more difficult to attain for nomadic pastoralists. An elderly Gujjar Mohammad Israel comments,

*The purpose of wuzu is to tell Allah that that my intention/vajoot is clean (pakh) and I am going to stand in your presence to take your name.*

Their main desire is that the ritual of *wuzu* should be remembered and practiced without any excuse by a faithful Muslim. They also encourage in maintaining both physical and internal purity by being cautious of the words one utters before and after the ritual of *wuzu* and *namaz*. The cleansing ritual of the body before the *namaz* is observed strictly in their everyday lives. However, for many Gujjars who are still following a nomadic lifestyle, things are challenging due to lack of adequate water or water resources for cleaning themselves while undertaking their seasonal migrations.

### **Moulvi's Teaching – Radio and Cassettes and Qu'ran**

The *azan* is a sacred calling for the Muslims which prepare them for keeping aside a time for Allah. *Jumah* (Friday prayer) in the *masjid* is taken very seriously by men as

they see it as an essential duty for Muslims where the focus is on Allah who has given various instructions to the Muslims to live in the world. Men and young boys who attend the *masjid* spend an hour or more offering *namaz* as well as listening to the teachings from the Qur'an. Women on the other hand listen to the teachings generally from their homes, especially when the preaching is being broadcast through the loud speakers from the mosque. Differences in terms of faith and display of piety between men and women are interestingly uneven and will be further elaborated in the discussions below.

Gujjars also use radio and cassettes to listen to the religious messages. Most of the Gujjar households have at least a radio/transistor or a cassette player that keeps them informed of the world. Elderly men listen not only to the national news or cultural programmes in the radio, but also religious programmes. Mohmad Israel, an elderly man in Rakh Baroti Gujjar has a collection of cassettes containing teachings of Islam. The teachings in the cassettes are generally in Arabic which according to him are brought from Mecca and circulated among them. Families sometimes sit together and listen to the teachings nodding their heads, and children raise questions when things are unclear. Unlike the past, when radios played a crucial role for communication, today cassette players (C.Ds and DVDs) and television sets are playing significant role especially among those who have chosen sedentary lifestyle. Commodities like cassettes or C.Ds containing teachings in Arabic, brought from Mecca by people who had gone for Hajj, are circulated among few who have the

privilege of listening in their own homes<sup>28</sup>. An object like the cassette player is valued as it is a medium for propagating piety for their lives to be pleasing to their God. They admit that television is not a good medium and many say that it as a sinful activity to watch television. So, for them the safer bet is listening to a radio which is not visual and it only engages one's ears which is not sinful.

Communities in the 21st century cannot deny the fact that media has a roles to play even in faith building. The cassettes containing the Qur'anic recitations and preachings, alongside the preachings in the *masjid* are seen as an essential medium for building up religious teachings in the community. Here the idea of listening is powerfully displayed and it keeps the community religiously alive. The nomadic ones are still in the stage where they rely on transistors and tape recorders. Many of them are so poor that they are not in a position to afford television and even where they are resettled they hardly have any space and access to basic amenities like electricity which makes it impractical to possess a television set. Phones have come to the rescue in this issue, where people can store music or prayers and listen to them as they move from place to place.

Another popular idea that Gujjars uphold is the labelling of the notion of *sunnat* with that of *moulvi*'s teachings in the mosque or listening to *azan* or the radio or cassette player playing religious texts. As we further analyse the sermons and the medium of

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<sup>28</sup> Herschkind has also revealed in his study regarding the political content of the sermon cassettes in the context of Middle East, especially Egypt, which is not devoid of political content, which is however of not military political orientation but rather around social responsibility and pious comportment, and devotional practice (2006: 21).

'sounds of piety', we find that there is more than just the religious dimension, where people are taught about the spiritual matters. It also influences their social and cultural lives, as the sermons attend to the ideas of living properly in the society as Muslims<sup>29</sup>. They try to employ the teachings of the *moulvi* in their lives with great diligence. Also, the sacredness of *namaz* is engraved in the hearts and minds of the people<sup>30</sup> as seen in their everyday call to their prayers to which they respond automatically without having to remind one another. Of course, there are exceptions where the elderly are more serious about all the rituals and the younger generation are a bit lax to all this. Saleema often complained about her grown up sons who do not keep their everyday prayers faithfully and often warn them saying "*you will be judged by Allah on the judgement day!*" to which the lads laugh and do not listen. The Qu'ran, is also an important asset for the Gujjars, and many of them though cannot read it still kept it devoutly on a higher platform inside the house, set apart from other things. They treat the book with great care as it is considered *pakh*.

### **Namaz - Gender**

Coming to the family interactions, we find the gender socialization starts at a young age. They encourage the children to read the Qur'an and perform their *namaz*, as they themselves dutifully perform it everyday. Segregation of boys and girls is done

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<sup>29</sup> Herskind in his work also reveals similar observations where he comments that sermons historically in Muslim communities served as an 'ethical therapy' where the preachers preached to enliven the audience's sense of pious fear (37). Today sermons have taken new shape in terms of exhibiting itself in terms of "social and political context shaped by the modern structures of secular governance, on the one hand and by styles of consumption and culture linked to a mass media of global extension." (*ibid*:9)

<sup>30</sup> Doughlas (2000: xvii)

at an early age, and the values of piety are infused. The mother advises her daughters to put on their *duppata* and not to shout at elderly men when the *azan* echoes from the local mosque. Boys are told the importance of going to mosque for the *jumah*, wearing clean *kurta* and *pyjama* and to read the Qur'an in Arabic. Some of the families that can afford call the *moulvi* home to teach the children Arabic and also how to read the Qur'an. Zareena, a young Gujjar girl remarks,

*My father made the effort since my young days to teach me the Kalimah as well as the postures to perform the namaz. As a Muslim we are supposed to do the steps accurately without any mistake.*

Many times it is observed that young people show less keenness to perform the *namaz* which is often attributed to laziness and lethargy by the elders. There are also others who reason out the problem of having to work outside as to why they are not able to devote time for this important act. The elderly in the community are the main agents who encourage the younger ones in the perpetuation of such practice that they think is important for religious discipline and also as an act that need to be respected as the Prophet also practiced it.

With regard to the relationship between husband and wife, we find men generally dominating in the decision making activities of the household. The idea is that since Allah created *baba* Adam first, therefore men are supposed to dominate over his household activities ranging from praying first at home, to offering prayers in the mosque and also in making the decisions regarding rituals related to sacrificing a goat etc. Women on the other hand wait until men have finished the *namaz* and then perform the *namaz* either inside or outside the house (See Plate 26). The reason for the precedence given to men is that they are busy and have to engage in many

activities outside home. Women do not have to rush to the *masjid* and so finish their task of daily prayers with ease. Children too follow the footsteps of their parents and observe the timings of ritual prayer in order. Family planning is banned by religious obligation. Alam Bibi, a mother of eight school going boys, living at Rakh Baroti settlement, says,

*It is a sin to undergo operation for family planning as it goes against Allah's commandments. So I did not get any operation done. I am happy with my eight sons. It's all Allah's gift.*

For them undergoing the family planning operation is *zulm*<sup>31</sup>. For them, bearing children is a boon from Allah. Shaheen a young married woman explains in this regard,

*In our religion, going for operation is prohibited. I have three children, I still would like to go for another child, and I prefer it to be a boy. Even my father does not recommend going for an operation. We are a family with eight sisters and my father is strictly against going for operation. He believes that it will not please God.*

The above statement clearly shows two distinct issues to be noted. First is the desire for a male child and second that the male member does decision making regarding family planning. This reveals the patriarchal authority when it comes to household decision making including even family planning. Women usually choose to obey her husband's decision as she thinks that it is the right thing to do. There are also cases where they do not fully adhere to their wishes and so there can be cases of divorce that eventually ruins the marriage.

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<sup>31</sup> Wrongdoing against someone.

The restriction of woman's entry to the *masjid* forces them to listen to the sermon through the loudspeaker that broadcasts the message. Not many women, however, seem to be keen on listening to what is being broadcast, neither do they have nor are there any religious compulsion that they should listen to sermons. They seem to be busy in their own worlds, attending to the household chores, taking care of the children and also doing their own religious observances. There is very little interaction between men and women in terms of sharing of their faith or practice on regular basis and thus limits the women's idea of the religious worldview, which is often in the domains of men.

#### **b. Activities performed in a group**

Communities live together and express their collective consciousness through rituals they practice as their religion directs them to do. Gujjars too follow several of the Islamic traditions with zeal and caution. Some of the rituals performed involving the person and the community at large are as follows. The *jumah* is a collective religious activity which has already been mentioned. Marriage is an occasion where religion plays a significant role.

#### **Marriage**

Marriage is a very important event among the Gujjars which is a collective more social than a religious activity, as manifested among the members of *biradari* especially. The *biradari* is a close blood and kin group of related members whose networks get strengthened through marriage ties and they make an effort to strengthen it. As mentioned before, Gujjars marry cross-cousins as well as parallel cousins though there is a preference or practice restricting to one type in some *zats*.

But the fact is that they prefer to marry within the kin group. It is well known that the Muslim marriage is contractual and the Gujjar acknowledge the same and say that *nikha* means a contract between a man and woman. However, they insist that it is Allah's design that rightful children be obtained through right kind of marriage of those who are obedient to Him. Therefore, there is a strong religious attitude and sentiment attached to marriage though it is a social activity and based on contract. The presence and confirmation of the contract is carried out by *moulvi* who is a religious specialist or leader or elder for the community. In the rituals the Qu'ran and prayers play a significant part.

Gujjars are concerned with the future of their children, who are encouraged to get married at the right age. The emphasis laid on early marriages for girls is that it is advantageous as motherhood is easier, there is less burden on the part of her natal family to take care of her; easier to establish friendly relations with the in-laws as there will be more time to interact and take care of the children and so on (See Plate no.7). Most of the women who have unmarried daughters often say,

*It is not good for girls to stay long in her parent's home as they can have children when they are young and by the time they reach our age they have children like that of their age. It does not look good when woman marry late and have babies later in their life. It is difficult for them to manage things in that way.*

Marriages are big affairs involving the entire *dera*, *biradari* and people from the entire *gaon* (village or settlement); even relatives staying in different far off places in the state and beyond also participate. Shamujddin a Gujjar of Rakh Baroti settlement says

*Once nikah is fixed, this is such a powerful covenant made between boy and girl, like iron chains, which no one can break. Even if they are apart for hundreds of years even then this covenant will not break.*

This statement shows the value they have for the union of a man and woman through the institution of marriage. It is also a very enjoyable occasion for all as people gather from different parts of the state and meet each other. Gujjar marriages are quite crowded with both men and women sitting in the same room sometime and mostly on the floor. The bride wears bright red or green *salwar kameez* with the *duppata* covering her face, with little jewellery. Her jewelleries included one gold necklace, earrings and a *long* (nose ring) which married Gujjars often wear which is received as *mehr*<sup>32</sup> during their marriage. Many Gujjar women who came for the sending off ceremony of the bride also wore similar jewellery. The newly married women especially wore big nose rings. There are no strict rules for gifting the groom's family which is called *dowry* as they can give anything ranging from jewellery worth thousands of rupees to their cattle or utensils. Generally people give away their cattle<sup>33</sup> in their daughter's marriage. The dowry can be given immediately or later. During the marriage, all the relatives and the neighbours usually bring gifts like milk, butter, ghee, sugar and so on. Some others give money ranging from ten rupees to hundred rupees and above to the bride. The tradition of

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<sup>32</sup> Among the Muslim communities, *mehr* is the right of the bride at the time of *nikaah*; the amount has to be paid at the time of the solemnization of the *nikaah*. The *mehr* amount is 100% of his annual income (see Niaz and Apte 2012: 269). Girls are given *mehr* by the *shohar* (husband) and his family. It consists of some gold jewellery (necklace, nose ring, earrings), and buffaloes. Her earrings cost about Rs. 10, 000 and her gold necklace cost around Rs 20,000.

<sup>33</sup> According to some elders the price of one buffalo is about fifty to sixty thousand rupees.

giving cash to the bride after having a glimpse of the bride's face still continues. Some elderly men of the *biradari* record the money given by guests.

Food is served by the men, as people sit on the floor, plates are passed on and the food served. The items served are generally rice, curd, meat or *paneer* (milk solids). People bring various items like milk, fruits or ghee as gifts, but nowadays the trend of giving money has become popular. Marriages in the past used to be a three-day affair where the entire ceremony was held in both the bride and the groom's place. The boy's family takes the first step by asking the girl's hand in marriage and if the family agrees, the *nikah* is fixed after twenty days. *Nikah* ceremony is usually in the bride's home.

There is no music or dance in the *khanabadosh* Dodhi Gujjar marriages or Bakarwal marriages. However among the *Desi* Gujjars in Rajouri district, which have more settled Gujjars, we find the common practice of women singing and dancing among themselves. There is also a tradition of moving to and from the maternal home and the in-laws' place which is a common practice among young girls in their initial years of marriage. Whenever any marriage takes place in a Gujjar village, people of the village including the relatives and friends of the bride accompany the bride immediately after the marriage and drop her at the groom's house where she stays for seven days. In these days the bride is kept under the care of the mother-in-law and other elderly women in the household away from male gaze. The bride is guarded and only then does the bride's party give dowry to the groom's family. On the seventh day called *satmaa*, the bride is taken back to her natal place by her father or

brothers. The bride stays with her parents till she attains her puberty as this stage is when she is considered *jawaan* (grown up).

After staying with her family for few years, the 'sending off' ritual of the married girl called *bidai* (farewell) is organized by her parents. It is a small gathering of friends and families in the settlement. For Zatoon a young married girl in Rakh baroti settlement, her *nikah* had taken place a year ago but since she was very young then, she was not sent to her in-law's place. After a year the *bidai* ceremony was organised. On that day, her mother gave her a bath and her close female relatives adorned her with a bright red coloured *salwar kurta*. She did not have an elaborate make-up except for the black *surma*, an eye make-up. The *moulvi* is also invited for conducting prayer for the bride and her life and after which everyone is given food, which could be simple rice and *dal* (lentils) for those who cannot afford an elaborate meal, while others may include meat in their menu. The bride is sent off along with few of her relatives and some relatives from the groom's side. In some cases, the entire ritual of marriage is performed again, where the groom with the *baraat* (groom's wedding procession) comes to pick her up and this is the occasion where the dowry is also given in cash or kind.

Many older Gujjars see a remarkable difference in the way marriages were conducted in the past as compared to the present times. An elderly lady remarked,

*In the past, girls used to go to her in-laws place immediately after marriage but nowadays they stay back in their father's place for months together and do not go to their in law's place immediately. In case the in-laws force the girl to come home, she threatens them that she will go for talaak."*

The older generation thinks that the young people nowadays are rebelling against their authority. The trend which is most of the elders complaint of is that young people do not want to listen to them and prefer to get to know each other before marriage and then get married. Many also consider marriage by elopement in case parents refuse to agree to their wishes. The practice of arranged marriages and formal marriage alliances still continue but it has been challenged by the influence of modern mass media and technology like cell phones on which the elders in the community place the blame. Divorce cases and extra-marital affairs are also found to exist among them which is not discussed publicly as it is a taboo.

In recent years we also find cases where Dodhi Gujjars are marrying Kashmiris and Bakarwals. These cases are few as the community does not allow such marriages even though they all follow the same faith. However, the families eventually approve on the basis of one reason that they are also Muslims. One important reason for not encouraging marriages outside their own community is their unique lifestyle and economic activities. They feel that marrying within the group will help in strengthening the economic ties that are already there. Since their livelihood is based on cattle wealth, staying together as a family through such marriage alliances help economically. The people who will be invited will be more or less from their own kin networks, thus strengthening their kinship network. Marriages of daughters or sons are celebrated elaborately with food and get-togethers, and according to them bring honour to the family. Anything contrary to the marriage rules laid down by the community is looked down upon, but eventually the couple gets accepted even

though such practices bring shame and conflict among the members of the community.

There are also other challenges that the community faces today which threatens the fabric of the family and marriage. These are domestic violence and extra-marital affairs which is slowly becoming common among the Gujjars, which, however, are hidden from an outsider. Many women face it silently without revealing it as they say, “*Allah’s will and what can I do*”. Some other’s justify saying,

*It depends on people’s attitude and the way they think. Whosoever has good brain (deemakh) will not commit such harm on women.*

Since the practice of polygyny is allowed in the religion, there are many men even among the Gujjars who have more than one wife. Haleema says,

*Even our Prophet (nabi) practiced this marriage custom and therefore there is nothing wrong in it.*

But, men have said that they do not like to keep several wives in the present times due to the challenges of present day expenses. Even though it was considered an asset to have several wives for economic reasons in the past, today many do not encourage it. In other words, though in terms of their religion, this practice of having more than one wife is allowed, yet it is not generally preferred and is looked down by women. In case of *talaq* (divorce), the Gujjars view it as a *gunah*, as they consider that marriage of two people is joined by Allah. However in reality there are cases where men have divorced their wives for several reasons like barrenness, or suspicion of having an extra marital affair, pressure from the In-laws side etc. It is a simple act for men as they just have to utter the word *talaq* three times in the presence of two or

more witness and the divorce get approved. However, women do not like the idea of divorce as they feel that they should also be given the chance to prove their innocence. But women feel that they do not have a say in the entire process and cannot do anything about it.

### **Death and its significance**

Whenever any death occurs among the Gujjars, the whole community comes forward to extend support and solidarity with the bereaved family and observe the rituals associated in disposing off the dead. The death and disposal are religious concerns, as it is Allah's wish that one has to leave this world permanently and the burial should take place accordingly. Food is not cooked for three days in the house where the death has occurred but in their neighbour's place. On the day of the funeral relatives come from various places to mourn and pay their last respects. People mourn by recalling the character of the dead person, the good things he/she had done and so on. Women and men sit separately in different rooms. When a woman dies her face is generally not shown to any men other than her father, brother and uncles (close relatives) otherwise she has to be given the ritual bath again. As for the dead man, his face can be seen by anyone. For them the dead has to be immediately disposed off so that the corpse, which is considered as 'unclean' will not defile others. The *moulvi* is invited, while the corpse is given *gushl* (bath) and the body is shrouded in a white sheet of cloth. After the *moulvi* and some other men pray<sup>34</sup> over it, the male relatives put the corpse in a mat, and carry it together to bury it. They

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<sup>34</sup> The prayer here is called *janaza* prayer.

generally do not use any casket, but put the corpse lying towards its right side. The *moulvi* prays and the corpse is buried.

For some Gujjars, especially among the Bakarwals and few Dodhi Gujjars, a special ceremony called the *khatam sharif* is organised by the family of the deceased<sup>35</sup> (See Plate no.19) They say “*ham khatam sharif parate hein har beerbar ko.*” (We recite the *khatam sharif*, every Friday). From the day the person died till the fortieth day, they keep a a fixed devotional prayer meeting, where every Friday, they hold a special meeting in the house of the deceased led by the *moulvi*. From morning till the evening, both men and women gather in the house, for prayer. One to two persons from every family related to the dead is invited to attend the *khatam sharif* and they bring ghee, milk, sugar and so on to the family. *Khatam sharif* is for all the people who came that day. Around 50-70 people are called to take part in this ritual. Men especially sit together, along with boys from the local *madrassa* led by the *moulvi*, who recite the Qu’ran and also the *durood*<sup>36</sup> for the dead person. They pray for the *rooh* of the dead person so that he/she attains *jannat*. The last *khatam* is called *chalisa* (meaning fortieth day) with which the ritual concludes.

The *moulvi*’s role is important for this program. The *khatam* is organized also for other reasons, like if someone wants to just call for *Allah*’s blessings, they can do the same thing, and invite the *moulvi* along with 50-70 people to perform the *khatam*

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<sup>35</sup> Generally Gujjars like to call it *durud* but Bakarwals call it *khatam sharif*. However both the words are used interchangeably.

<sup>36</sup> It refers to some specific verses from the Qu’ran which are recited in the form of prayer and is considered to be a blessing when one reads it. The more one reads it, the more his/her sins are forgiven.

*sharif*. However, the Gujjars who claim themselves as Wahabbis<sup>37</sup>, about whom it is discussed later, are against the practice of this ritual. They justify saying,

*We do not perform khatam. Neither Allah nor our Prophet has said anything about it in the Qur'an.*

So there is a disagreement within the same community, regarding this particular practice.

### **Festivities, faith and community participation**

Other occasions in which the community participates is with regard to the forty day fasting period, the month of Ramadan<sup>38</sup> (they use the word Ramzan). This is followed by two major feasts -Id-ul-Fitr and Eid (*Eid-ul-Zuha*). They do not follow the Islamic calendar and rather depend on the local *moulvi* to set the date for the activity. Ramzan involves abstinence from food and physical pleasures like sex or food, while emphasizing on becoming good Muslims via good deeds and clean thoughts. During Ramzan, fasting starts with sunrise and ends at sunset which continues for forty days. We find women cook food in the late evening and they do not cook anything after it is dawn. They generally break the fast with *roti*, butter milk, milk and dates. Women have many restrictions during this month, as those who

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<sup>37</sup> When we look at the history of Wahabbism, we find its consciousness developing with *Darul Islam* (Arab. *Dar al Islam*, or territory of Islam) which emerged through oral contacts, pilgrimages, studies in Cairo and also with the emergence of a local Islamic press (Evan 1987); especially in the case of South East Asian Islam. Wahabbi movement led by Muhammad Abd Al-Wahab rose in Arabia in 1750 (Campo 2009)

<sup>38</sup>The ninth and one of the most sacred months of the Muslim year, it is the month in which Holy Qu'ran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad. It is now considered as a month of fasting. Ramadan ends as it starts, with the *ru'ya* (crescent sighting), El Guindi (2008: 116).

are menstruating or are pregnant cannot observe the *roza*. Sick people also cannot observe this *roza*. Muslims all over the world observe this festival which gives them a sense of belonging with one another. After the rigorous fasting for a month, the Eid-ul-Fitr, which Gujjars call *bada Eid* is celebrated with great enthusiasm. It involves people visiting one another wearing new clothes, cooking special dishes like *kheer* (sweet dish) and the like. Everybody expects their neighbours and relatives to come to their houses and that is how the whole day passes. Such feasting, however, is prohibited for households where someone has recently died. Sometimes their Hindu neighbours visit them and they share a meal with them too. Though they generally do not eat in a Hindu house, they do not mind them coming to their house and sharing a meal. The reason being that, as Muslims they should abstain from eating food or taking anything from them. They consider it as *gunah* to eat in Hindu's house, as they drink *sharab* (alcohol), eat *pork* and meat which is not by *halal*, and worship idols which is strictly against their belief.

The other occasion is the Id-ul-zuha also known as *chota Eid*, which commemorates the sacrifice, when Allah asked Ibrahim to offer his son Ishmial as *qurbani*, sacrifice which, however, was replaced by a *bhed* (sheep) by Allah. They remember this occasion by sacrificing a *bhed* where an individual household that can afford it or sometime two three household together sacrifice a *bhed* and the meat is distributed in equal parts to the neighbours and to the poor. They will choose the best animal as they believe that Allah will accept it. This ritual is also called *qurbani* and generally the senior most member of the community performs the ritual. He and several men keep the animal in front and offer prayer saying Allah-hu-Akbar several times and

praying over several things. They pray that their *gunah* will be taken away by the *bhed*, and that they will be blessed as well protected from any evil. Those who cannot afford such an expensive affair, instead offer sweets during the occasion. The Dodhi Gujjars buy the sheep from a local shop, while the Bakarwals select from their own sheep and use it for marking the occasion. They often feel uneasy to kill their own sheep or sell it as they consider them as their own children. They also justify that unless they do that they will not be able to live.

### **To Hajj: a wish of a lifetime**

Many Gujjars dream of visiting Mecca-the Holy place of pilgrimage and many rich Gujjars have already undertaken the pilgrimage. Shamuiddin, an elderly man says, “*there is nothing like getting the opportunity to visit this holy place. I also long to go one day*”. They know that if they keep this tenet, there is a sure place for them in *jannat*. Mohamad Ali, a seventy year old Gujjar had undertaken Hajj few years ago. He fondly remembers his journey to Mecca where he also saw the Kabbah in Medina. Like him there are a couple of Gujjars, especially those who have settled in Jammu, who proudly narrate their sacred journey to Mecca. Another Gujjar, *moulvi* Omar says that by birth some people are destined to go for Hajj. Another elderly Gujjar who had undertaken Hajj mentions,

*It is generally those who are good and pious who can undertake the Hajj. God predestined people to go before hand. People who do not go can also not go to paradise. People remember God when they go there. This is generally done to walk in Allah’s way better.*

The phase when people go for *Hajj* is called *umrah*. Hajj is undertaken just before the *bari Id* (Eid-ul-zuha), once a year. They celebrate the *bari Id* in Mecca itself. Everyone in the neighborhood along with friends and relatives are invited for a prayer and lunch before leaving home for Mecca. If a person has an unmarried daughter, he will perform his duties as a father to get his daughter's *nikah* finalised and if he has any debts he clears them off and only then he undertakes the *Hajj*. Families bid tearful goodbyes to the person as he/she set for the pilgrimage as they do not know whether they will see each other again. Another Gujjar who had undertaken the journey shared his experience during the Hajj saying,

*We are made to wear special robes during the pilgrimage called eram, which is a single white cloth piece of 12 meters length, and we wrap up our body with it. We meet different Muslims from all over the world, we all unite as one in the prayer in Mecca, and we feel that one of our most important obligation as a Muslim is fulfilled by this visit. After a person comes back from the Hajj it is essential to celebrate with feast by inviting people from all walks of life.*

Once the *hajji* comes back after a successful Hajj, people come again to pay visit to the *hajji* and are supposed to look first on the head and face. They consider it as auspicious for it gives them some kind of satisfaction, contentment and also enlightenment. They all look forward to hug and kiss him. People pay enormous respect to a *hajji* as he has fulfilled one of the basic tenet of Islam by visiting the most holy place. The *hajji*'s claim that only the chosen ones undertake this pilgrimage and it predestined by Allah, reveals the way people understand the entire issue. Also, the idea that those who cannot undertake this pilgrimage are not eligible for an entry into paradise is a matter of concern among those who cannot go. For

some of them who have undertaken Hajj, people believe that they have acquired special powers to heal some simple ailments by his prayer and touch. Having visited Mecca, he is considered as someone who has followed the *sunnat*.

Every Gujjar who is a Muslim wishes to fulfill this basic tenet in their lifetime as it affects their identity as Muslims, and is also in obedience to the law. However, many of them lead lives of poverty and indebtedness and so visiting the Mecca is a distant dream. Often they console themselves by undertaking a *chota-Hajj* ('mini-Hajj') as a substitute or an alternate deed. For instance, visit to Ajmer Sharif *dargah*<sup>39</sup> for seven times is equal to that of visiting Mecca or going off to Hajj. Ajmer *dargah* is a popular shrine which draws thousands of visitors daily, mostly people from various faiths. It has the mausoleum of the Sufi saint, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. This shrine is also known as the Dargah Sharif located at the foot of a barren hill; it is considered as the last resting place of the saint who died in 1235 AD. Many of the Gujjars revere this *pir* besides other local *pirs*. They mostly keep aside Thursdays to visit the *dargahs* as this day is considered as auspicious.

The belief of 'pilgrimage' to Ajmer Sharif as equal to a Hajj, however, is not subscribed to by many Muslims, including some of the Gujjars which has maintained a kind of silent dissent among them. Bashir, a middle aged man, has just returned from the Ajmer pilgrimage which according to him was fulfilling and he had already visited several times. He mentions about the positive aspects of the visit, like for

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<sup>39</sup> Ajmer is a major Muslim pilgrimage centre in northwest Rajasthan. Home to the shrine of Khawaja Muin al- Din (or Muinuddin) Chisti who is one of the most popular saints in India ( Campo 2009:26)

him, accessibility was not a problem as a direct train is available from Jammu and other districts to go to Delhi and from there Ajmer is not very far. The entire process of being able to visit the *dargah* and offer his prayers and petitions before the revered saint is an amazing experience for him. He proudly displays the souvenirs that he brought back from Ajmer, which included several *tawiz* for everyone in his family, and also framed photos of the Mecca and the sacred verses from the Qur'an, which he has hung in his small hut. While some other Gujjars, who cannot even undertake such short pilgrimages, they do something else like marrying off their daughters, which are obligatory duties of a Muslim before leaving the world. With this they try to pacify their obligation that is required of a good Muslim. While undertaking the Hajj is a religious obligation and visiting a *pir* or *dargah* is not a religious obligation, it is a topic for debate as many Gujjars hold on to the tenet that no one is authorised to take the prayers to God except the Prophet. In fact, visiting shrines is not a socially approved activity; but in reality quite often many Gujjars do visit *pirs* and *dargahs* on different days of the week according to their needs.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed and described the way Gujjars conceptualize their world, which is centered on aspects like sacred spaces and structures like the *masjid*, the *dargahs* and also the migration spaces like the routes and mountains. Within the domains of all these spaces and structures, they practice their faith; try to connect with Allah at all times. The interplay of their nomadic lifestyle and faith is also exhibited when they view the spaces and the routes and mountains they migrate to seasonally as opportunities to draw closer to Allah. Within all the sacred structures,

the role of the sacred specialists cannot be ignored as they are the medium through which the basic teachings of Islam are imparted to the people. The operation of various life cycle rituals in their lives both collectively as well as the individual effort to keep up with the ideals of ideals of Qu'ran Islam , helps them to become devout Muslims.

They uphold the idea of connecting with Allah through the sacred specialists, especially the *pir*, who for them is an important person who deserves attention. The whole idea of a mediator between God and men brings forth the thought of how desperately people seek a better person to fulfill their needs. In other words, their social, biological and material needs get a better platform to be represented to God through the initiative of the *pir*. They emphasize that *pirs* are important as they show the *seedha raasta* (straight path), *saccha raasta* (true path) and *reham ka rasta* (path of mercy). The *pir*, even though he is a Muslim, is looked up to by people of various backgrounds, thus breaking the barriers within the normative religious practice. Secondly, it is seen that the idea of healing is connected with the *pir* though the *pir* may emphasize that it is Allah who heals. The Sufi tradition of veneration of saints like *pirs* is found to be a common practice among the Gujjars who are mostly pastoral nomads. However, Gujjars do not include many other practices of the Sufi tradition like singing or poetry.

All this reveals how their everyday lives (non symbolic) revolve around keeping the ideals and norms of Islam i.e., symbolic like -basic teachings of Qu'ran and the Hadith which is reflected in individual and group activities. This is true for any community that professes Islam that no matter what cultural practices one may have,

teachings of Islam still has greater influence over their daily activities and thus gives them their way to live. All these also reveal how people imagine and govern their relationship with the sacred.

## Chapter 5

### Being Muslim Gujjars: The *Model of Religion*

*It is not Islam that shapes Muslims, but rather Muslims who, through discourses, practices, beliefs and actions, make Islam. (Marranci 2008: 15)*

#### Introduction

The present chapter attempts to describe the Gujjar Muslims' religion and world view, its construction, and the direction or guidance emanating from the tenets of Islam.<sup>1</sup> What they do in their everyday lives which forms part of the pre-established non-symbolic system<sup>2</sup>, are all means to showcase their alignment with the larger symbol structures,<sup>3</sup> which includes everything from their belief in Allah and spirits; to their ideas of life and death, good and bad conduct, significance of dreams, shrines, *dargahs*, ancestral graves, cattle and piety. They believe that in the

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<sup>1</sup> According to Haq, in Islam there are three levels simultaneously i.e “metaphysical, naturalistic and human”. Also there is the interdigitation of the Qur’anic notion of the natural world and natural environment with that of the very concept of God, and also with that of humanity (2001: 146). All these three levels do not exhibit “any independent conceptual self sufficiency of, or a conceptual discontinuity between, the three realms of the divine, of nature, and of humanity.” (*ibid*: 146). In other words, all the elements function in relation to one another and that is what is seen manifesting in the everyday conversations about faith and practice.

<sup>2</sup> Geertz’s idea of Model ‘of’ reality refers to “manipulation of symbol structures so as to bring them, more or less closely, into parallel with the pre-established nonsymbolic system...” (1973:93)

<sup>3</sup> Taking Geertz’s concept of symbol, which includes, “any object, act, event, quality or relation which serves as a vehicle for conception...” (*ibid*:93)

beginning there were no organised religions like today and there was just one Creator called Allah who made the first man called *Ahdam* (Adam) and from his rib made a woman called *Ama hawa* (Eve). There are four categories of beings – God, angels, spirits and humans.

The following pages will discuss aspects of how the Gujjars construct the human life vis-à-vis the supernatural beings-Allah and all the spirits. Also the interaction of humans with the spirits is important as it reveals the complicated nature of functioning where we will look into aspects like healing techniques and testimonies of healings which the Gujjars share. The way *dargahs* are mushrooming in the city and Gujjar's idea of such sacred structures, which brings together people of different faiths, also will be focused alongside the aspects of cattle, food and faith among the Gujjars.

### **I. Perceptions of Human life and Source of life**

The Gujjar conceptualise human life as given by God; just as the tree is a creation of God, so are the humans and their lives. Both life and death are in the hands of God. Human beings are like leaves of a tree and the natural death of human beings is like the falling of leaves; death is not the end of life, there is paradise and hell where one goes to spend eternity on dying. While the dead body is buried; the spirit would leave either to paradise or hell for eternity. The spirit of innocent children will surely enter the paradise. The world is inhabited by good and bad people, and one is expected to lead a good life in order to enjoy life after death. The good people are like innocent children. The angels are divine beings who do not live on the earth like

humans, and are servants of God who carry out His commands. This is expressed in the following statement:

*There is a tree in jannat (Paradise) with Allah. This tree is full of leaves. These leaves represent the lives of human beings. There are farishte (angels) sitting and guarding the tree. So whenever a person dies, a leaf falls and the angels take the leaf and present it before God. God tells two angels to go and take out their rooh (spirit) and bring it to him. Those who have done good will go to paradise but those who lead bad lives will go to jahaanum (hell). Little children who have died will go to paradise too and all good people will be eating fruits in paradise and will never go hungry.<sup>4</sup>*

Makku Bibi, an elderly Gujjar woman, shares this statement which unfurls the linkages between human life- good and bad people, children, with that of the metaphysical- Allah, angels, spirits, paradise, hell and the natural- tree. She is one of the few women in the Gujjar settlement who is known for being knowledgeable about religious matters. She is an ardent follower of Allah and observes her *namaz* five times faithfully everyday.

Her view unambiguously states the frailty of human life on earth. She has elucidated the nature of human beings as consisting of *sharir* (body) and *rooh* (spirit) which are two different substances. If there is no *rooh* in a person there is no life in that person. For Makku Bibi, *rooh* means a kind of *haava* (air). Only Allah is *amar*, who lives forever, and Allah gives the *rooh* to human beings. It means humans got life from Allah who is the source of life. And when it is taken out of the *sharir* by Allah, a person will cease to live. Accordingly, they believe that there are two kinds of *rooh* in a person- *Kassef* or *ganda rooh* in Arabic (bad spirit) and the other is *lateef* or *saaf/ paakh rooh* in Arabic (clean spirit). The *ganda rooh* makes people to sin and

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from Gojri.

the *paakh rooh* makes people to do good things. As children who are innocent go to paradise, the good people who maintain their innocence or follow the precepts of Allah will go to paradise after their death. All children get good spirits but it gets replaced by bad spirits if one engages in bad deeds. The good spirit continues if one maintains the Islamic piety.

Gujjars also express the temporality of life and eternity after death through the phrase, “*zeh zindagi char din ka mela*”<sup>5</sup> (‘this life is just a four day fair’). *Sharir* is temporal whereas *rooh* is eternal. For them, all activities in one’s lifetime pass quickly and is short. They illustrate by saying that children are born, they grow up, get married and become old and die. The Gujjars’ cosmology revolves round the idea of alignment with Allah and also their *quom*<sup>6</sup> (community) which presents an interesting link between their religious identity and their socio-cultural identity.

In every conversation about life, they describe or indicate struggles and helplessness as human beings who are at the mercy of Allah, especially when they consider themselves to be deprived as Khanabadosh Gujjars and they hold on more to Allah who they believe understands them better. They are emotional towards Allah and

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<sup>5</sup> These words are used commonly by most of the Hindi speaking population where they stand for the fragility of life and that the life on earth is not permanent. Gujjars too with time and acculturation seem to have imbibed this notion and now uses it in their vocabulary.

<sup>6</sup> To understand the word *quom*, we need to understand what *biradari* is first. *Biradari* in the literal sense refers to brotherhood, which includes people claiming descent from a common ancestor. This classification is commonly found in Northern India, especially among the Punjabi society. The *biradaris* collectively form larger units known as *quoms* or tribes. See <http://www.currentsocial.com/pakistan/tribe-and-clans-of-punjab.html> (accessed on 23.7.2013)

draw strength by addressing everything towards the divine. As one of the informants Shamujuddin expressed, though they are backward and poor, they are good in their *mazhab* (religion) and it is the right kind of path. The statement “*our religion is right and we are faithful to our quom*”, which they often say, reveals this link. For every occasion starting from Ramadan to Eid, the activities that they undertake are obligations they are to follow as Muslims and dictated in the Qur’an.

**a. The wide world of spirits: Gujjar construction**

The Gujjars believe in several spirits, and many of those who still migrate to higher altitudes in the mountains and stay temporarily near the jungles and streams in their nomadic life of grazing the flock, narrate stories of their experiences to those settled in the towns. The people who have encountered supernatural beings tell and retell the same in the community and thus these spirits become part of their everyday discussions and are generally seen as malevolent beings. Therefore, children are restricted from venturing out in the night and women are cautioned from going to particular places where the spirits dwell at some particular time of the day. All, however, do not accept these beliefs, and it is observed that women particularly hold on to these beliefs more astutely than men in most cases. The spirits are given different identities as Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh and even Buddhist. The tormentation of spirit is expressed as ‘spirit attack’ or ‘evil-spirit attack’. This belief reflects on the Gujjars’ attitude towards other religions and inter-religious interactions. However, not everyone agrees with such interactions as they deem such practice unIslamic, thus causing discontent within.

Families emotionally recount how their loved ones struggled with spirit possessions or attacks of the spirit, an evil eye, *bura nazar* etc. They worry if any family member does not return home by an expected time after venturing out in the jungle with the cattle. Their worst fear is that some kind of a spirit or an evil being has caught him/her rather than an attack of a wild animal or losing one's way in the jungle. Women fear venturing out during certain period of the day even in the vicinity where they believe certain harmful spirits popularly called as *Jinns* or *jogins* are haunting that may attack them or cause health problems. Secondly, they have also acquired knowledge or keep adding to their knowledge about religious specialists among them who would come to their rescue and who can be an appropriate or perfect mediator at the time of crisis situation. They also keep contemplating as to how being Muslims they can tackle the situation and, to react and seek help from the right sources at such times of crisis from supernatural beings, more powerful than them.

### **Spirit world**

The spirit world consists of these types- *jinns*, *bhoot*, *jogin*, *jurreal*, *pari* and *Masan*. Broadly spoken of as *tasruf*, these kinds of spirits or quasi-spirit beings occasionally torment, oppress or even possess certain people. They also use the word *Shaitan*, who is also called *iblis* and is considered as a bad spirit that works to harm human beings. A *moulvi* who serves among the Gujjars in the local *masjid* mentioned that in Islam there are *athara haazaar* (one thousand eight hundred) varieties of spirits. There are many ways that people associate themselves with these spirits in terms of their characteristics such as those who are malevolent, mischievous and some even harmless and with benevolent traits. Such beings transform into various

forms, transmigrate, create awe and wonder in the minds of those who claim to have seen them or have heard from others. The Gujjars believe that only few sacred specialists endowed with special power are capable of understanding the intricacies and also control the behavior of the spirits. The following accounts will detail various encounters that had led them to certain beliefs and to seek help to tackle the problems brought about by them.

### ***Jogin/jureal/jalpir***

The encounter with the spirits is a common phenomenon for those who live in the mountains and often venture in the jungles with the cattle. Zatoon, a young Gujjar girl says,

*We do not venture near the water bodies like ponds or waterfalls in the vicinity during certain period of the day like late afternoon or night as the jogin will harm us. She is a woman spirit with long hair and generally, attacks people who go to the waterside at certain time of the day. Those who are attacked by her have problems like losing of speaking ability, serious incurable sickness and even leading to death. I am terribly afraid of her and other spirits that attack people.”*

Zatoon made these utterances sitting outside her thatched hut, along with a couple of friends, who had come over for a late afternoon chat. While chatting they are constantly monitoring their buffaloes that are grazing in their sight. They have expressed their fear and concerns that prevailed over them with this fact that their lives are so much entwined with the natural surroundings, on which they are dependent, that they do not feel safe with regard to those supernatural beings that lurk around.

About the identification of *jogins* with the female being, it is a popular belief not only among the Gujjars, but also with their neighbours like the Hindu Dogra communities living in the area that the spirit takes the form of a maiden. The spirit haunts the mountain ranges the Gujjars generally migrate to during the summers. It attacks a man and can injure him fatally. *Jogin* is a Hindi term and according to the Gujjars when a young Hindu girl dies due to sickness or during childbirth, her spirit becomes a *jogin*. The other names used also are *baala* or *zenani* (female). Jogins are believed to kill both men and women whenever they come in their way. According to most of the Gujjars, a *jogin* usually harms an *unpar* (illiterate), one who lack the knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith. It can be noted here that *jogin* being a Hindu is dangerous to Muslim Gujjars, and it attacks Gujjars in their summer camps. The Gujjars migrate to the valleys from the hills and encroach upon the lands belonging to rich landlords who may be Muslims or Hindu, but the latter being the traditional owners or original owners. Further, the *jogins* attack the illiterate people. This reference to illiterate Gujjars who continue some practices which are un-Islamic and who visit saints of other religions points to the unfriendly relations with Hindus and the prejudice against those who do not confirm to the textual Islam. It shows the ideological as well as political and economic difference between the communities. The *jogin*, being the woman that died during child birth, is dangerous for it is against fertility, a blessing of God. A corollary of this identification with the Hindu religion, means Hinduism is inimical to Islam, and Hindu being dangerous to the Muslims.

Reporting of instances of water spirits' attack is common among the Gujjars and they generally attribute female personality to the spirits similar to that of *jogin*. The water

spirits are also called as *jurreal*. Thus, restrictions on the movements are imposed even for children apart from adults to venture into the spaces where they might encounter the malevolent spirits. Not so much is known, however, about this spirit, as it is seen only near the water bodies.

### **Jalpir**

Little Shoukat, a boy of four years wears a *tawiz* round his neck which was given to him by a *pir* living in the adjacent town. Saleema his mother narrates,

*My son's condition was very severe as he would not eat anything and kept crying all the time. This was due to the jalpir, a water spirit, which harms children mostly. My parents took him to the pir and he has been improving since then.*

Jalpir, the water spirit that harms children, is again a woman. Woman, who is supposed to perpetuate the society, can be dangerous when she fails to do so and runs against her nature given by God. If a woman loses the natural affection for children, she becomes a dangerous person. If a woman dies without getting her desire to have children fulfilled she can also become a dangerous spirit. As the death takes place according to the decision of God, if a woman dies before the desire of having children is fulfilled, the anger of the dead woman against God is turned towards children. The intention is to take away the children to be with her spirit.

### **Masan**

People narrate several interesting instances of encountering the supernatural beings first hand. This has an impact on the construction of the world in which the Gujjars live. The encounter with the supernatural beings impacts not only the person who sees apparition, but also the immediate family and the community at large. Ali, a

man in his mid 30s narrates with great enthusiasm about his father's experience with a supernatural being called *masan* in the 1970s. Ali recalls himself to be a young boy of ten and remembers this incident clearly. He narrates,

*My father once went to the jungle to get fodder for the cattle in the evening. He was possessed by a demon called Masan. That Masan took him to a cave in the jungle. People from the village searched for him the whole night but could not find him. The next morning he came back very angry and his eyes were very big and he did not say a word. He was acting like a mad man. It happened during 1978. His speech was not normal as he was stammering after he had come back. We contacted the local pir. He was later taken to the pir. The pir gave him a tawiz to wear on his neck and something to drink. In those days the use of money was not common, so people gave cattle in return of the pir's service. We gave buffaloes. However, he was not fully well. Slowly he regained strength and was well. He then told us the story. Masan takes the shape of animals- it first took the shape of a hen and later it changed into a goat and then it changed into a horse and then it change into a man as he followed him. It has happened to many people even before it happened to my father.*

It is said that not many people have encountered the *masan*, but there is a wide belief among them that it roams in the deepest parts of the jungle. Children are told of such stories to scare them to sleep or prevent them from venturing out, while adults also talk about such events in their informal gatherings or chatting and share personal experience with others. Its implications are their cautious movements when they go out either for grazing cattle or visiting other places while attending their routines.

Unless people see and experience themselves the apparitions is not taken seriously, as a mere fable or stories to scare little children. However, there are people who themselves have encountered these beings which have impacted their lives ever since. Having heard about the *masan*, Ali, himself in the later part of his life encountered it, which he could never forget. He said,

*I also have a kind of experience of a Masan one night. As I was returning at night, suddenly an animal just stood in front of me, it was like a zebra. Its neck started growing up longer and longer. I was scared. The colour of the animal was black and then I stopped walking out of sudden shock. The person walking behind me gave me a push telling me to move ahead. He did not see what I just saw. He also knew what was happening and then later the animal disappeared. Another similar incident which has happened after the first one was again to do with some animal. I was walking one evening alone when I saw two pair of oxen, coming towards me. Then I found their horns were stuck to trees and I saw them struggling and as I went to help them they disappeared, and when I went close to them they disappeared to my astonishment.*

Though *masan's* experience is not very common among the Gujjars, but all acknowledge its existence and its effect on people who experienced it.

### **Jinns and Paad**

Among the Gujjars, another very powerful supernatural being is the *jinn*. They are malevolent; watchful, invisible and present in the settlement spaces. In fact *jinn* is one of the beings that they blame for any kind of sickness. They say some *jinns* are good, while the rest are bad. Also there are Hindu *jinns* and Muslims *jinns*. For them, there are *jinns* that inhabit the graveyards, some reside in the spaces of the settlements, and some live in jungles and deep forests. Some *jinns* are said to have been made of fire, some are invisible and interestingly there are some *jinns* that are also 'literate' and some 'illiterate'. Shamasddin, a school teacher in Rakh Baroti Gujjar settlement says,

*There is Jinnstan (kingdom of Jinns) which consists of their city. There are both literate as well as illiterate jinns like us. The literate ones go to a masjid to learn the Qur'an and other Islamic books along with the children of the human beings which no one can see them. Jinns are one of the creations of Allah. Human world is different from the world of the jinns. The jinns can see us, but we cannot see them.*

The Gujjars conceive the world of the spirits as a template of the human world inhabited by the human beings. *Jinns* also are learning along with human children the religious texts, bringing to notice, their attitude towards these beings and their level in the hierarchy of the supernatural. The *jinns* are also considered to be inhabitants of their own kingdom, seen as followers of Islamic faith, as they learn the religious texts and teachings. The division of their world vis-à-vis the world of the *jinns* and the Gujjars' interaction with them is part of the religion that the Gujjar practice. All this reveals the way people construct the existing human attributes like good and bad; literate and illiterate etc., on the *jinns* as well thus manipulating everything in terms of human relationships. They attribute human qualities over these spirit beings. *Jinns* that study and learn Qu'ran along with children refer to Muslims that are aware of being what it is to be a Muslim but do not live the life of a good Muslim. The bad Muslims know what Allah expects from them but they still give trouble to people. They are like bad children who require correction through punishment. They attack people when no harm is expected, i.e.; noon time when it is bright in symbolic sense.

Another elderly Gujjar, Mohamed Din from Jindral Tehsil narrates how his wife suffered because of the possession of certain evil spirits believed to be *jinns*. He says,

*Even with my wife some incident happened where she was possessed by bad spirits. She started acting funny, became very violent and started attacking people. We took her to a pir. The pir's treatment was an expensive affair as it took not only our money but also our buffaloes. Even after the treatment, the problem remained. The pir told us that she has Jinn. Many times, because of the shock, she stops breathing many times and we have to give her external breathing help. I was very sad and I was also going mad seeing my wife and father's gesture towards the pir.*

Not everyone has a positive response towards the *pir*'s treatment and conclude that the *pir* cannot resolve all their problems. Meeting the *pir* and the payments to be made are beyond their capacity as they have to lose cattle, a lifeline and wealth, for they find that there is no alternative treatment for those affected of the spirits. When a decision is taken to take the sick person to the *pir* not everyone in the family favours such a decision for a costly treatment, but they ultimately go for it as they believe that they will find a better answer from a *pir*, who is considered to be a man whose prayer and acts pleases Allah. Many others also share their personal encounters with the *jinn*s in their settlements. Alam Bibi, narrates with great enthusiasm about her encounter with *jinn*s. She narrates,

*Even jinns attend the classes along with the children, though we cannot see them. They can see us. I have seen a jinn personally with my own eyes from a close distance. It had come near my house. I made the jinn flee from my place by just reciting the Qur'an and prayer. Jinns can harm people and will not be visible to ordinary people's eyes.*

She declares herself to be well versed in the Qur'an and the Hadith and thus has been able to tackle several ailments caused by the *jinn*s in her settlement.

Generally, the *jinn*s are considered as male and can be a Muslim *jinn* or a Hindu *jinn* as well. Abdul, a Bakarwal mentioned

*“ ek jinn jo ashiqui hojate hein insaan ke sath, voh ghayal karte hein beemari lekar.”*

(A *jinn* who falls in love with a human can cause sickness to the human)

According to them, *jinns* being male can fall in love with a human girl and this can harm the person. Also, if a person is *napakh* (unclean) in his/her body or thoughts, the *jinn* can easily attack. The only solution for such problem is by going to the *pir*.

The seriousness that they attribute to the *jinns* with regard to their belief in *jinns* can be noted in their everyday lives when mother tries to pacify their child to stop crying, by telling that or else the *jinns* will carry them away. The time when they consider the power of *jinns* to be the strongest is during the noon time and in certain locations like secluded water places or toilet spaces in the open field. Similar to *jinn* there is another category of spirits called *paad* which is found in the mountains. Mohmad Ali, Dodhi Gujjar mentions,

*It is a being, which can take any human form, and its remarkable characteristic is that its feet turn backwards whenever any human encounters it. Not many people know about it though.*

The older generation, especially those who practiced seasonal migrations, remembers such beings more than others. Not many of the younger generation have heard about them. It could refer to people who change and turn against what has been promised. These are the deceivers, not to be trusted on face value.

### **Farishta and Pari**

Another supernatural being that fascinates the Gujjars is the *farishta*, which is mentioned in the Qur'an, the angels. They classify them also into two types – one who write down the good deeds of the people and sits on the right shoulder and one who writes down the bad deeds of the people and sits on the left shoulder of the human beings. They consider that the *farishta* is sent by Allah to help people and to

warn them about coming misfortunes. They often mention the important role *farishta* played in the lives of the *nabi* (Prophets), through whom the divine plan of Allah is revealed. Popular *farishtas* that they mention include *Jeebrael* (Gabriel). They will also sometimes use the word *farishta* on people. Whenever a help comes from someone in times of their need, they often praise the person by saying, “ *you have been like a farishta to us.*” In other words, they also attribute any person who is of help or a source of help, to be like that of the *farishta*, whom they can relate to in the real sense. Some of them even claim to have seen *farishtas* in their dreams and some speculate that they have seen them, but not clearly in their settlement space. *Pari* is also another supernatural being, generally described by people as being female and who can understand human language and grant wishes of little children. They are characterised as having wings and with benevolent traits.

#### **b) The Influence of spirits among Gujjars: Significance**

Spirits are important beings for the Gujjars, because they are powerful and can help them as well as harm them. One prominent Gujjar who is also a *hajji* said that the prevalence of these many spirits is because of their lifestyle- predominant habitation in the wilderness or jungles which these spirits also frequent. They, however, see towns as more dangerous than the jungles according to them *Shaitan* dwells in areas where there is a large population. For them the other spirits who dwell in the mountains and jungles are harmful but not as dangerous as *Shaitan*. The Gujjar also conceptualize jungle or forest in an ambiguous way. The mountains provide very cool weather and a lot of pasture for animals and it is a better place of them as well as for their animals though the harsh weather during winter compels them to go

down the hills. They would come back to the hills with the rise of temperature in the plains. Of course living in the high altitudes is a hard life as compared to the life of those who live in plains. Further, the mountain and nomadic life has become harder these days due to the presence of armies of both India and Pakistan. They are often harassed by the armies and as a result their long cherished nomadic tradition has become an arduous task. They are compelled to leave the hills to settle down in places that have no semblance with their traditional habitations. With great reluctance they had to leave the hills. Thus, it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion about the forest, and this ambiguity could be one reason for the conceptualization that the jungles are haunting places of the spirits. Still, the mountains and the jungles are a better place for them than the cities. When they moved to the plains they were scorned by the settled Muslim communities as well as the local non-Muslim communities. They view that people in the towns are more evil because of the influence of *Shaitan*, makes them uncomfortable to associate with the settled population. For them all the miseries and problems that come with settled life in terms of being economically inferior and being ill-treated are all works of *Shaitan*.

### **Human-Spirit intervention: Jealousies - Sorcery**

Internal divisions and suspicions among the Gujjars is an important source of spirit beliefs. One aspect commonly found among the Gujjars, and also a major area of discontent among them is the prevalence of belief in the ability of certain men or women who can inflict harm on them via the use of spirits. Cases of infliction of sickness on people, which they call *jadoo tonna* locally, meaning ‘doing some

harmful magic', prevails. A particular victim narrates about her life and encounter of such power which caused her immense loss. She says,

*I had fifteen children but thirteen of them died and just three remained. My children died due to some unknown reason. May be it is because of some harmful magic that one of the women in my settlement did. I suspect her intention.*

There are cases of individuals performing some sort of contagious magic on each other which is deeply feared by the people. Speculations, fear and jealousy are common feelings that commonly float around in the daily gossips in the settlements. Secondly, many times such allegations are about some particular people among them who can inflict pain and sickness with certain forms of magic. The concept of *bura nazar* (evil eye) is quite common among them.

An elderly Gujjar woman in a group discussion among women adds,

*A lady who stayed near my house did something to my husband first and then later to my son because of which he stopped studying. He lost interest in his studies and he left school after 5<sup>th</sup> class. After that he also began to behave strangely. When my husband approached the lady to cure our son, she told him that he had to pay 2000 rupees to get the problem solved. We however did not give any money to her. Instead the whole biradari was summoned and she was warned that if she did something like that her head will be shaven and she will be chased out of the village. She can even stop birth of children if she wishes.*

Shama Bibi, a young girl in her teens, who recently married, also narrated her ordeal of some kind of magic that was done on her, which caused her immense ill health due to which she had to be admitted in the hospital for a week. The allegation of her parents was that one of the women in the settlement caused problem on her because of some personal rivalry with the family.

Another aspect which the Gujjars are careful of is in disposing the umbilical cord of the new born baby. They make sure that they dispose it off without showing it to anyone, for fear of sorcery. Since the child has not been circumcised they consider that the child is weak and any evil attack is easily possible. This can also impact the family at large as well as bring misfortune.

Many others have expressed their fears and experiences over these sudden attacks on their cattle against which they are helpless. In case of suspicion over a person of creating such problems, the *moulvi* intervenes as such cases come under the perview of religious specialist. Accordingly he decides what should be done. In most cases, the person is warned and told not to repeat such activity again. It is not possible to find overt socio-economic differences among the neighbours in a settlement or locality, but there are certain distinctions across the communities. Jealousy is one reason that the Gujjars say is the motivation behind harming others by involving spirits. This can be noted in the expression of Gujjars being less concerned about religion but more concerned about money these days. The *moulvis* lament about the changing times and how people and their motives towards God have changed. One common complaint made is that people now are more inclined towards secular education and making money. *Moulvi* Rehem a Gujjar, says,

*Gujjars these days want their children to go to school for better life so they send them to schools and only a few turn up to the madrassa... These days people are busy with earning money and no time even to make it for the prayer in the masjid. Also, there is so much hatred and lying prevalent among people and we encourage them to shun from all the evil ways.*

The *moulvi* has not elaborated the reasons for 'much hatred' among them, if it is because those who acquired money, seldom helped the poor, and the latter developed

a hatred for the rich or those economically better off. The secularization is due to the presence of non-Muslims, and the influence of non-Muslim by which Muslims are affected.

### **Healing techniques**

They are filled with awe over the powerful sacred words of Qur'an that the *pir* chants and also write down in a paper for them to dip in water and drink the same or wear in *tawiz* form. Rather than going to an allopathic doctor for help, peoples prefer to get their immediate cure from these kinds of sources. It should also be noted that meeting the *pir* or visiting the *dargah* is not an easy affair for them as it requires many hours of tedious journey and transportation is a problem. Their nomadic lifestyle makes it difficult to obtain easy access to transportation as they live high up on the mountains. However, leaving aside their discomfort they undertake the tedious journeys to meet the *pir* as they trust in the prescription that the *pir* gives. It is holistic as it helps both body and spirit. Many of them acknowledge that it is *Allah* who heals finally.

### **Testimonies of healing**

There are so many *dargahs* the Gujjars visit from Ajmer Sharif to the Wangat Sharif, Kistwar *dargah* and many more in Kashmir. With regard to *pir* reverence, Lal Hussain, an elderly Dodhi Gujjar from Jammu narrated that they generally go to the *dargah* of Kishtwar *pir* (which is a place much after Baderwah). This *dargah* consist of the graves of father and son, visited by many for healing of sickness, fertility blessing, journey mercies etc. Once a year, Lal Hussain goes to this place, alone or

with his wife, to offer prayer or request for the needs of his family and cattle. Many go there for fertility blessings. Another woman, in Rakh baroti settlement, narrated that her four year old daughter was healed of a serious eye infection because she offered prayer in this *dargah* by promising two silver coins in the shrine. Soon in a week's time the child was healed. An old Gujjar woman also shared her reverence towards *pir*. She said that she had recently visited the Kistwar *pir* and that her prayer was answered, and said, “*whatever we ask we get!*” She believes that the *pir* in the shrine is still alive and ‘watching and listening’ to her and all that come there. She says that many people whom she knew also got their prayers answered when they prayed to that *pir* for blessings for children, or for success or wealth. For instance, Shakina, an 18 years old married Bakarwal girl who was also not able to conceive for quite some time, narrated that only after visiting the *pir* and wearing the *tawiz* that was given by the *pir*, she conceived and a baby was born after a year. She ties a *tawiz* on her baby so as to ward off ‘evil-eye’ from her. Juna a 15 years old married Dodhi Gujjar girl who suffered from severe ill health, which was thought to be from an ‘evil-eye’, a magic done on her by her neighbor, got healed immediately after visiting the *pir*, who gave her a *tawiz* to wear.

Saif Ali, an elderly Gujjar who recently returned after attending the Urs<sup>7</sup> of the famous *pir* Nizammuddin in Delhi says that he also visited Ajmer Sharif and Shadara Sharif in Srinagar and also brought *tawiz* from those places for his children. He wears a *tawiz* that bestows good health. Issues of health and healing are a vexing

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<sup>7</sup> Referred to as the death anniversary of a saint, where there is celebration at the dargahs.

concern for this community. It intertwines with faith in their everyday lives. Zeena Begum, a Gujjar woman in her 40s wears her *tawiz* on her neck which she got from a *dargah*. She explains how wearing that has helped in overcoming sickness which she suffered She says,

*When we go to a living pir he gives us the tawiz because in that thing there is cure as it restores our life (shifa hote hein). When we wash a dirty cloth with soap, it cleanses the cloth and makes it white, likewise the tawiz cleanses of our wrong doings (gunah). God also forgives us of our wrong doings.”*

*Shifa* means restoration or spiritual healing. *Tawiz* is understood as something that restores health to the body by cleansing the wrong deeds in a person’s life. The *tawiz* symbolises something more than a physical object that brings healing outwardly but also giving internal cleansing. The significance of wearing the *tawiz* also extends to other members of the family, including their cattle. As one strolls in the settlements we find some of the buffaloes with *tawiz* on their neck. Among the Bakwarwals too, a common practice seen is the tying of *tawiz* to the sheep and goats for their protection and well being. These are obtainable not just from the *pirs* but also in places like the popular *dargahs*. It is believed that evil spirits or a *buurre nazaar* can be kept at bay with the *tawiz*. Generally *tawiz* is commonly administered to the sick. It contains important verses from the Qur’an written in a small piece of paper which is prayed over by the *pir*.

The kind of mysticism that one sees with regard to the actions being performed involves a convincing performance on the part of the healer which attracts the people. While looking at the functional aspect of such a practice, we can agree with Brown (1952:103) that it meets the different needs of the people like blessings of

fertility of crops and children, reincarnation and life after death etc. According to him, in order to understand a religion, the focus should be on the rites rather than on the beliefs. Such aspects like belief in the rites involving the *pir* or a *moulvi* or a *Hajji* and his 'acts' towards providing a possible solution to their problems be it spiritual or physical is surely a step towards understanding the Gujjar religion. The utterance can be considered as having 'performative' function according to Tambaiah (1973).

### **c. Hindu-Muslim Animosity, dreams and shrines**

As has already been mentioned the identification of Hindu woman *jogins* with Hindu women, and television programmes propagating Hindu culture, it would seem that the Gujjar's religion is pitted against Hinduism and Hindu society. Hinduism is visualized as the religion that is against Islam. The Gujjar would never want to eat anything that their Hindu neighbours offer, nor would they like to form any alliance with them socially or culturally. Many of them claim that harmful effects befall as a result of mixing the ashes of a dead Hindu man or woman in the food of the victim by a person intending to do harm. The result is that people become sick and even die. It is believed that spirits of non-Muslim are more dangerous and driving them off or dispossession of them would be effective only with the intervention of the saints of other religions. The same is reflected again in the dreams and construction of *dargahs*. For the Gujjar Muslims, dreams hold a special place in their religious tradition. It was in a dream that the Prophet got the divine revelation. Even now Gujjars talk about the importance of dreams and subsequently link it to some events happening around them. They believe that if they dream of light and bright things it

is considered as good. Many of the *dargahs* are made out of compulsion as a result of dreams that people have in which men clothed in bright white dress appear. These kinds of revelations can come to anyone, a Hindu or a Muslim. If they dream of dark and unclear things, it is considered as bad omen. An elderly Gujjar said that a one year old *dargah* near a Gujjar colony in Jammu which is just a one roomed house was built by a Hindu who saw a dream about a dead Muslim saint. And that is how he was compelled to make the *dargah*.

Such incidents seem to have been inversions resulting from Hindu-Muslim conflicts that culminated in the partition of India in 1947. Many elderly Gujjar claim that the Indo-Pakistan partition resulted in huge loss of life and property. In the name of religion they were divided. In this episode, thousands were killed. The Muslim and Hindu relations became worse after the partition of 1947 when many Hindus were chased out of Pakistan to India and many Muslims were chased out of India to Pakistan. People were all over the place, not knowing what to do and where to go. In this turmoil and chaotic situation, the land and houses which earlier belonged to the Hindus in Pakistan were taken over by the Muslims who built their houses over them. Similarly, the land and houses of Muslims were occupied by Hindus in India. Gujjars say that people had disturbing dreams. The Muslims were bothered so much that they were restless. In order to find a solution to their problem, they consulted the religious specialists who advised them to built shrines. The specialists insisted that this kind of phenomenon was the work of the spirits of dead Hindus buried in places over which their houses were built. Similar narratives can be analysed from the other side also, like this statement by an elderly Gujjar who said,

*During the 1947 war, many true followers of Islam were killed by the Hindus. Later when Hindus came and settled in the places where the killings happened they got terrible nightmares and could not sleep in the night. At the same time diseases and misfortune struck them. In their dreams they used to see a man dressed in white clothes and with long white beard. They believed this figure to be the spirit of the slain Muslim man who told the Hindu that he was murdered in that place and that they should leave this place and maintain his grave here. And people responded to the dream. There is no bone or remains of the man, but with the belief that the man died here, the Hindus of the locality built a shrine in that particular spot. In the dream only the place was revealed after which people started building the shrine.*

These thoughts are held by both Hindus and Muslims including the Gujjars.

There is a common practice among Desi Gujjar women of paying reverence to anthill and snake holes by offering milk and coins<sup>8</sup>. They explain that it is done to maintain *darja* (reverence) only. It is a *puṛn hotahe*<sup>9</sup> (it is a blessing) for those who maintain and protect them. In general too, many Gujjars consider seeing snakes as auspicious. Such beliefs and practice are generally considered unIslamic by men yet it is also seen that in certain households, among the Desi Gujjars, men permit their wives to offer things in the 'sacred space'. The reason why such practices are allowed is due to the fear that some bad omen might befall the family if they do not offer milk and coins near the anthill and the snake hole.

These practices have been seen more in the case of women and their daughters who are home most of the time. Their interaction with women in their neighbourhood who belong to other faiths like Hinduism have to some extent influenced them. Such practice could also be the residue of their past Hindu beliefs and practices.

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<sup>8</sup> These are very clear traditional Hindu practices.

<sup>9</sup> This statement is actually seem to be influenced by the Hindi speaking neighbours like the Dogras, who are Hindus and they use this language.

#### d. Cattle, food and faith

As stated before, Gujjars love their cattle and take good care of them; They are experts in taking care of the cattle; in cases of injury they use traditional medicines to nurse and bring them back to health. Bakarwals often say, “*Baer bakre ke bina ham khatam hojayenge.*” (Without our sheep and goats, we will be over). Another common feeling that they share with outsiders regarding their tradition is,

*“Yea ham doa karte hein ki jesa hamare ye rivaaz hai vo aesa bane rahe, Hamare buzoorgo/ pegambaro ka ye pesha hein...barkat bhi bahut thi. Ye hamara baer bakra ka pesha tha na, is mein kharcha kuch nahi tha. uss zamane mein. App toh ziada kharcha.”*

(This is our prayer that this tradition of ours continues...our forefathers/prophets’ livelihood it was...it had lot of blessings. In this tradition of keeping sheep and goats, we did not have to spend much in those days. Now we have more expenses)

Similarly the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars also often say, “*Ham hein hamare dangar keliye*” (we are because of our cattle) and “*maize hee hamara sabkuch hein*” (Buffaloes are everything for us). Buffalo herding is their life line and they value their cattle a lot. According to them the reason for migration and taking all the trouble every year to go to newer places is to get good fodder for their cattle. They do not worship the cattle but value them by not eating or harming them. Female buffaloes called *lajiri/khangari* are given more importance as they see them to be life giving, being able to produce offspring and also give milk which sustains their life<sup>10</sup>. Male buffaloes are generally sold for meat in Kashmir and other places. If buffaloes

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<sup>10</sup> The buffaloes, which give milk, are called *lajiri*. *Khangari* are those which grow old and gives less milk. Male buffaloes are called *katu*. Female buffaloes are called *kati*.

die, they are buried or just thrown outside the village. The deep attachment with the buffaloes is seen in terms of the names that they attach with their cattle. Every cattle has a name. Shaheen Bibi, a Gujjar lady says,

*Like parents recognize their children, likewise we recognize our buffaloes as we feel that they are like our children. The buffaloes also pray for us when we feed them and when we do not feed them they curse us/ baaduah dete hein. We go and pray for buffaloes in the dargah too.*

They have certain way of classifying a buffalo to be good and bad. Those buffaloes which have straight pointed horns, one or both horns bent down or pointed up; those that chase and kick people, and does not eat food properly are the 'bad' buffaloes. Accordingly the attributes of good buffalo are those that eat food well, give good milk, do not chase people, have soft skin; the nasal portion is white and has long tail. There are times when the buffaloes get really sick; they lack appetite, stand/sit still, do not make any noise, stop giving milk or give less milk. According to them such ill health can be due to hot and dry weather, less availability of fodder and less water to drink. Fresh *shatala* (green grass), *khal binola* (cotton plant type) and *gehu ka chilka* (wheat husk) are very good fodder for buffaloes to keep them healthy and yield good milk. According to Lal, a Dodhi Gujjar male buffaloes are stronger and more likely to get angry. In the past male buffaloes were used to plough and carry burdens but in the recent times they have been replaced by tractors. During *chand grahay* (lunar eclipse) they do not go out nor take their buffaloes outside.

Islam does not propagate vegetarianism nor allow unlawful killing of animals for food. Even if they kill animals it has to be done in the right way<sup>11</sup>. Idea of *halal* and non-*halal* meat is common among Muslims with reference to purity and pollution of meat is concerned. *Halal* refers to legally permitted procedure of slaughtering poultry or meat, as given by the the Shariah (Islamic law). The opposite of *halal* is *haram* which refers to being unlawful. Thus anything to do with the *haram*, makes them impure and they have to abstain from it. The staple diet of the Gujjars is rice or *roti*, which is eaten with few locally available vegetables fried in oil. They eat less meat in their regular diet; rather prefer to have vegetables, milk and milk products. They avoid eating meat despite the abundance of buffaloes because of their deep attachment with their cattle. This of course has nothing to do with religion as Islam allows consumption of beef. However, Gujjars do not consume beef openly also because of the state's law that prohibits cow slaughter. They revere the buffaloes which is similar to the reverence of Hindus towards the cow. These kinds of beliefs have more bearing on Gujjars of plains who are normally settled than those who are still pastoral nomads. For the Dodhi Gujjars, buffalo milk is used in every meal, from making tea to making curd and curries, it is a vital part of their daily diet. They often mention that they have *mota dimakh* (fat brain) because they drink buffalo milk, which is considered to be thicker than cow's milk. This according to them is the reason for slow learning and being less progressive as compared to others because they cannot think fast due to their *mota dimakh*.

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<sup>11</sup> It is decreed by God that everything should be done in a good way, even killing an animal; the right method should be used. (Haq 2001:172)

Bakarwals keep large number of sheep and goats. Only on special festivals like Eid and marriage, do they slaughter the animals for consumption and also sell them. They will generally not eat the meat of a pregnant sheep or goat as they consider it as *gunah*. Milk of the goats is used by the families for their own consumption. They consider the milk of the goats as *sunnat*, and good for health. They also believe that when the sheep or goats bleat it is a good sign. Children therefore are given goat's milk to drink. Bakarwals generally make an analogy of their sheep and the goats with that of the human beings and the shepherd, as Allah, who takes care of the sheep and goats. On the high mountains, the sheep and the goats grazing immediately come near the shepherd when they hear the whistle of the shepherd even from far. The cattle, like people have the tendency to go astray and get into trouble without the shepherd. Allah is the one who watches over them, provides for them and takes care of them daily. This idea is upheld among them and that is why they have a close association with their cattle, for whom they take all the trouble, climbing the steep mountains despite harsh climate and dangerous routes. They make sure that during Ramzan their cattle also fast, so that it brings blessing upon them. According to them, animals have the power to see good and bad things in man. So they treat them with great care. When it comes to ensuring their safety, they employ various avenues. Some of them tie the *tawiz* around the neck or on the feet of the cattle. One of the elders of the *kafila* puts a seal of multicoloured marks on the sheep and goats to ensure their safety.

e. **Ideas of obedience**

**Blessed words and language**

Gujjars greet each other saying *Asalam waliakum!*, meaning peace be upon you. Men, women and children all adhere to such forms of greeting each other and even outsiders. Many elders however, feel that such greeting should be used strictly for greeting Muslims alone. They believe that their own Prophet had started this tradition among the believers so as to identify themselves from the rest. Thus, they want to keep this tradition alive. The notion of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are strongly emphasised with regard to their beliefs and practices as they consider what they believe to be the right thing.

In their everyday conversations they bring in the idea of Allah who for them is all powerful and mighty. Like for instance the other word for Allah is *Khuda* (meaning *Lord*), and many times in a day they like using the words like, “*e Khuda!*” which means O Lord! or “*Allahu!*” or “*Allahu Akbar!*” which means God is great, or “*Allah ke kasam*” or “*Khuda ke kasam*” which is actually chanting the name of God in every conversation. Women especially use the words quite often in different occasions. Razia, a young girl will always tell her mother ‘*khuda ke kasam! I finished my chores*’ whenever her mother about her chores. Women and men often use the word “*Allah hu!*” as a stress buster word to tackle their tiredness, by taking a deep breath after a long day’s work or while doing their work. They also swear using words like “*Qu’ran di*” (in the name of Koran), “*Allah ki*” (in the name of Allah). Such words are deemed as *sunnat*.

Uttering the name of Allah is not necessarily out of their religious devotion as such but most likely based on their understanding that the sacred words give them some kind of comfort and relief from their immediate trials. It is also a manifestation of internalized deep faith in Allah. It may just be a casual recitation of Allah's name, a stress buster word or a meaningfully implied utterance, which have been passed on from one generation to another; though these words are taken for granted, they still hold value in their lives.

Another aspect of their faith and expressions is their relationship with their neighbours, which have influenced their worldview to some extent. We find that their lifestyle and culture is influenced by the interaction with the locals. Dodhi Gujjars of Jammu have the Hindu Dogras as neighbours who live adjacent to their settlements in the mountains and even in the plain regions of Jammu. In this way we find them displaying some kind of tolerance and acceptance to certain cultural practices of theirs. For instance, they sometimes interchangeably use the word 'Allah' with 'Bhagwan' (Hindu word for God), and sometimes they use the Hindi word 'karishma' for miracle instead of 'chamatkar' which is the Urdu word.

When it comes to language, there is always a connection with the religious dimension among the Gujjars and the Muslims in general. Gujjars speak Gojri as it is their mother tongue, yet they also give much importance to Arabic. They consider Arabic as the 'heavenly language' because the Qur'an was revealed to their Prophet in Arabic<sup>12</sup>. That is why they believe that learning it is a *sunnat*. A superior position

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<sup>12</sup> It is to be noted that Islam started in the Middle East, with Arabic as its medium (Houben 2003:151).

is given to this language in their everyday lives and it is uttered only during their personal prayers and meditations. Aisha, a middle aged Gujjar woman who is quite well versed in Arabic (she reads her Qur'an in Arabic) boldly claims that people who could not read nor speak Arabic are *anpar* (illiterate)<sup>13</sup>. According to her, all those who could read and write Arabic are *para ho* (literate) and should be proud of it. For them other languages are not as important as Arabic, so despite Gojri being their mother tongue and Urdu the official language of the state, they give importance to Arabic. From a young age, children learn Arabic in the local *masjid* where they also learn the Qur'an and other religious texts in Arabic and Urdu simultaneously. Though everyone consider Arabic as an important language, yet not all can read or understand it. The ideology of its importance remains popular but in practice, not everyone stresses on learning.

### **Gender roles for obedience**

Men have access to the religious practices like going to *masjid* and makes decisions with regard to marriage and divorce which according to them is in accordance with their religious teachings. Women are the pillars of the home in the way they look after the affairs of the husband, children and the household. Segregation of boys and girls take place at an early age, where the values of piety are infused with all the rules of being feminine, which involves veiling. Little girls in the *masjid* while learning their lessons put on their *duppatas* as boys too are clothed in their neat *salwar kameez* and the *topi*. Most women do not know how to read or write and so

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<sup>13</sup> The researcher was also included in this category by her.

are not able to study the Qur'an by themselves. On top of that, various responsibilities of the household prevent them from following their religious pursuits with zeal and to learn more about from the text. Elderly men often express their concern for the safety of the girls and women and stress on their protection as they feel that the former are attractive and fragile and thus vulnerable to evil gazes. Shamujddin an elder comments,

*Our Hadith says that girls should cover their head with scarf from the age of seven. Women (aurat zat) are such wonderful things (cheez) which the master (malik) has created ...like a flower which blooms in the sunshine and appealing to men. Women should not be talking to men just like that...it is considered bad as it gives bad impression to men.*

The above statement shows the attitude of men towards women and also their concerns about women being the weaker sex needing protection. Women and girls often venture out to the nearby markets for selling milk and many times have to take the buffaloes for grazing purposes. Gujjars emphasise so much on modesty for women and also the way women should lead their lives. They often warn their women folks not to venture out alone or go to any house alone or talk to any male stranger. It is not only the religious restriction which Islam imposes on women but also because of the current state of affairs and volatile situation in their vicinity. For instance the Kashmir conflict where they also hear about girls being captured and killed etc.; which scare them and thus impose restrictions for their daughters or wives. Girls start covering their head with head scarf from an early age as it is acceptable and prevents men from staring at them. Also women tie their hair properly so that it will not cause distraction to any man. An old man Muhammad Yaqub comments,

*Girls have been created by Allah in a different way. It always is good to cover the head and show less skin as men are easily attracted by their physical appearance. There are many men who are not good in their thinking and can harm the girls if they do not cover their body and hair properly. The times are bad.*

There are also several restrictions imposed on women, which are expected to be obeyed. There is no difference between social/religious injunction. When it comes to women, we find many strict regulations imposed on them during certain times of the day, or month, where they are not allowed to cook, perform their *namaz*, take part in *roza*, nor allowed to go out. Either it is during their monthly periods, or immediately after child birth, such restrictions are imposed where they are considered as unclean. Saleema, a young girl comments, “*It will be zulm (wrong doing) if we overrule the practice.*” When a child is born, there are several regulations imposed on the mother of the child. She is considered to be ‘dirty’ for forty days because of the spilling of blood and other impurities discharging out of her body. Elderly women often give the reason that a woman after her delivery is considered as *kaccha jan* (weak body) and therefore forbidden to work. The woman is also not allowed to feed her child for the first three days and the child is just nourished by giving some *goor* (jaggery) and water whenever it cries for food. The mother on the other hand is given a special food mixture called *banda* which consists of powdered wheat mixed with dried fruits and nuts. Delivery of the child is mostly done at home and by the *dai* (a local mid-wife).

After the birth of a child there are social and religious regulations imposed on the mother. If they break the rules, they believe that adverse consequences will follow. An elderly woman narrated an incident that happened to her own relative who had

given birth to a child. The woman who had delivered just ten days before went into the nearby jungle to fetch wood and while doing so she fainted there and was brought back to her house with much difficulty. The relatives immediately summoned the local *moulvi* who performed the *khatam Sharif* so that they could ask for healing and forgiveness to Allah. It is said there are several incidences, such as this one, where the consequences have been very bad.

Another important restriction imposed on women is that they are not allowed to visit graves even when their close relatives die. Zareena, a young Gujjar girl from Gujjar colony, Jammu, comments,

*When my father passed away, I could not even go and see his burial. Though I insisted, everyone kept telling me that the dead in the graves will not like girls in their spaces. They will see us naked.*

The idea that girls will be seen naked disqualifies them from entering the graveyard. The girls or women should not be exposed even to the dead people's *rooh*. Second reason for this prohibition is that they are considered unclean due to their menstrual cycle. If they want to pray for the dead man's *rooh* they are asked to do it outside the graveyard. While another interpretation is that, if the daughter goes to visit her father's grave the *rooh* of the father will tell her,

*O my daughter, if you come to my grave we will not be meeting at kayamat (the end of the world).*

These restrictions are strongly upheld among Dodhi Gujjars who consider themselves as Wahabbis. For them visiting any grave is a *gunah* and especially for girls, it is completely forbidden. While among the Bakarwals, visiting the graves is

common, and women can also go to the graves and pray. So we find them popularly following *pirs* and visiting *dargahs*.

All these aspects contribute to their idea of obedience. The obedience means doing what is right in their daily activities. Most men in the settlement are keen to attend the weekly *jumah*, especially elderly men, who are very strict in their daily religious rituals like *wuzu* and *namaz*, and for some even counting beads and uttering the ninety nine names of Allah. Since they are milk sellers (in case of Dodhi Gujjars) mostly and sell sheep and goats (in case of the Bakarwals), they interact with many non-Muslims everyday. They often claim that they do better *vaipari* (business) with others as their milk quality is the best and as Muslims they are supposed to be truthful not to cheat others in obedience to Allah. However, some of them also admit that due to less production of milk by their cattle, they have to add water to the milk, which, Allah understands. They view people of other faiths to be all one who does not know Allah and hence are in the wrong path, which is disobedience to Allah.

### **Cleanliness and devotion**

Cleanliness is a very important aspect for them as Muslims. The physical cleanliness is referred here, that one has to keep, with regard to cleaning the body with water and wearing clean clothes besides others. Shamujjuddin, a Gujjar says even boys are prohibited from entering the *masjid*, if they are not physically clean. For them they believe that if one is not clean outside, one cannot be clean from the inside. Islam focuses 50 percent on physical cleanliness and the rest on *namaz* and *roza*. However, in reality keeping up the idea of cleanliness is difficult for the pastoral nomads,

because of their lifestyle and many times they are not habituated to keeping themselves clean. The cleanliness also has to do with speaking clean words, uttering the name of Allah, and the verses from the Qur'an which are all clean in the sight of Allah. Also, to be pure in the sight of Allah is to recite the *kalimah* and *namaz* daily. We find Gujjar women and men often whispering the word “*Allahu!*” “*Allah rehem kare/may Allah have mercy*”. For them the acts of cleanliness lead to purification of the person's soul. So unless one performs the basic tenets and lives accordingly one cannot be purified. In other words, cleanliness is an essential hallmark of Islam and Muslims need to obey it.

#### **f. Ideas of disobedience**

##### **Defying the rules of Islam**

Like all Muslims, they assert the authenticity of the Qur'an as the last revelation and the Prophet Muhammad as the final Prophet and entertain no arguments beyond this theology. According to them, anyone who adds or removes anything in this matter is believed to invite Allah's wrath. Thus, they normally do not entertain the ideas of other religions or worldviews. If as Muslims they do not obey the five tenets, it will bring judgement from Allah. They also believe strictly in the day of judgement, where those who have faith in Allah will go to *jannat* and the disobedient will go to *jahanum*. They fearfully express that the severity with which evil people will be dealt with is unthinkable as they will be tormented with fire. An extreme analogy is used to describe the fire in hell by the people in their everyday conversations such as this,

*The fire with which we cook food also pleads for relieve from the fire of hell which shows the severity of the place, hell.*

Fear of punishment by Allah, and the consequences of bad deeds make them search for solutions to escape from that predicament. This concern drives them to take a step further beyond the norms of the formal religious prescriptions such as chanting the name of Allah several times in a day, or attending worship at the local *masjid* and offering *namaz*. Apart from the above illustration about fire and its relationship with hell fire, there is also another analogy that they use especially with children and guests, who are just learning about how to eat certain food. For instance, with regard to eating wheat bread (*roti*) which is their staple diet, the children are generally warned not to waste food and also eat in the appropriate way, i.e., eat the *roti* from the sides and not tear a bit of it from the centre and to also eat the burnt outer portion of the *roti*. The consequence of one not following the steps will result in punishment during the *vakalat ke din* (judgement day). One elderly woman remarked,

*Allah himself will pull your skin like you removed the outer portion of the burned roti.*

The whole idea of wastage of food and the ‘improper way’ of eating is considered to be *gunah*. This shows not only of their sustainable attitude towards food but also how their attitude to the ordinary things of life is interdicted with the divine ordinances. Being able to connect the simple activities of life with the divine is a matter of great importance for them. Anything that deviates from a particular way of life, Gujjar sees it as sin, like the way they socialize their children.

## Unclean words and deeds

The Gujjars strongly uphold the ideas of ‘clean’ or blessed words and are against ‘unclean’ words which are for most of the time associated with taboo and punishment. The utterance of the word *swoor* (pig) is thoroughly discouraged. They say,

*We will become un-holy (na pakh), and we will have to keep our mouth shut for forty days and only after that we can talk.*

They instead use the word *voh* (meaning ‘it’) to address the pig. According to them, the Qur’an prohibits the usage of the word and considers the pig as a dirty or unclean animal. However, the Qur’anic association with it is also debatable as it is not clear<sup>14</sup>. For Gujjars, it is *Shaitan* that created all the dirty animals like pigs, owls and night birds. Also, drinking alcohol or using any addictive substance is considered impure for a Muslim as it defiles the body and spirit as well. However, ironically, many do not adhere to these norms. For instance, there are many among them who smoke *beedi*<sup>15</sup> or smoke using the *hookah*.

## Acts of disobedience

Another aspect they disapprove as Muslims is listening to songs or playing any musical instruments. The irony is that the Gujjar women and girls are very good singers and generally pass their time singing and joking. This is, however, done

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<sup>14</sup> The whole issue regarding the idea of referring the word ‘swoor’ as impure is debated as the Qur’ān is not very clear about it. Though Qur’an does prohibit the eating of pig meat, but not fully condemn it. See (the verse in Qu’ran Al-Baqara, 2:173) in Khan and Al-Hilali (1999).

<sup>15</sup> Thin local cigarette filled with tobacco.

outside the gaze of any male member. Women sang songs of love, about their lives, their interests, their tradition of migration, joy and pain etc, which violated the moral code<sup>16</sup>. Women do not sing in the presence of men, even their own husband or father. This displays the way they deny themselves the sentiments in their “ordinary language interactions in less intimate social situations”<sup>17</sup> They would often say,

*we will be scolded for singing. Men do not encourage us to sing. Also our religion does not encourage singing.*

Many of the young boys and girls could not only sing Gojri songs, but also Dogri (language of the Dogra community who are Hindus) as well as Urdu/Hindi songs very well. Listening to radios and the use of mobiles has promoted listening to music much more among them<sup>18</sup>. All India Radio Jammu and Kashmir also have programmes in their broadcast especially meant for Gujjars, where they telecast Gojri songs and folktales. The interested Gujjars love singing and listening to songs though there is religious prohibition to listening and singing. The women folk proved that something that is to do with their culture always supersedes the religious beliefs and practices.

They love to sing songs of migration, love, struggles and so on alongside chatting about match making and bringing in the latest gossips of neighbours and family

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<sup>16</sup> Abu-Lughod (2008: xviii) also finds similar pattern of expressions, in her study among Muslims women in Egypt, with regard to expressions of song about sentiments of love that defy the moral code.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid (2008: xvii)

<sup>18</sup> Marsden (2005) also reveals how music, poetry and travel have an important role among the Muslims in Chitral.

members. Kulsoom a young girl in her mid 20s from Sanasar valley sings a love song about a lover who is trying to woo a girl. This particular song is quite popular among the Gujjar girls and conveys the message of their adolescent desires and daily activities centering their lives.

“pani ddani ye shaan maare.....(2 times), ek pardesi raaba, ke ye dhushman a daa mare..

(She went to fetch water, met a stranger, who turned out to be an enemy.)

“lambi lenu shetoo pani..(2 times) kena jo daya ..changi gori nu pani...

( refers to a pretty woman who goes to fetch water and there she meets her lover)

“akh shap tare mendi ( 2 times) puphi diya di putara meta tera di mendi.”

(refers to the arrangement of marriage by the man’s aunty by putting mehendi on the girl’s hand”).

Agreeing to what Geertz has said, “*all cultural performances are not religious performance...*” (1973:113) , I find that in the case of music and listening to songs which are cultural in essence, it has nothing to do with religion or a religious performance. However, the way people look at cultural practices seem to have an antagonistic relation with their belief system, which may often lead to discontent among themselves. It is the way certain ideas-like religious, moral, practical, aesthetic are carried out by certain influential groups (Geertz 1973: 314). In this case we cannot deny the influence that male members in the family has on the rest, especially the fathers and also the religious specialists like the *moulvis*, the imparters of religious teachings, who hold on to the opinion of music being ‘sinful’ and ‘unIslamic’. In spite of this, there are also men who do not totally abhor listening to music, be it Gojri folk songs or Hindi songs, which is their favourite timepass, more so with the use of mobile phones, which many in the recent times own.

For them, any form of music is alien and *napakh*, unholy, and that holds the same for the medium through which it is shared. As mentioned earlier, television watching is considered to be unislamic and therefore bad as it shows all the contents which may prevent a Muslim from living a pious and religious life. However, it is also seen that people do keep televisions and update themselves with the latest news and entertainment especially women and children who often watch the programmes when men are not at home. But elderly men discourage such practice, tagging it as 'unislamic'. Sedentary Gujjars are more into owning television sets and even connections to dish T.V whereby they can access multiple channels. Gujjar women like to watch Hindi serials, which they watch with awe and also criticise stating that the serials which are mainly about Hindu families and culture are about them, and that their lives are as is shown in the serials. Some of them recommend watching certain T.V channels, which broadcast about Islam and teachings of Islam. They often spoke about the teachings of a popular Muslim theologian Zakir Hussain, who comes on television regularly.

Acts of disobedience also include pre-marital relations of boys and girls, elopement, extra-marital affairs, use of family planning methods, using unfair means in doing business with others, not taking care of their cattle and so on. All these are *gunah* in Allah's sight.

When it comes to imposing restrictions on women, the society socializes girls from a young age what is it to be an obedient Muslim woman. Usually, the behaviour of women or girls is judged on the degree of exposure they show with regard to their freedom of moving from one place to another. The more a woman moves freely

beyond the house, the more ‘un-religious’ she is taken to be, because she has not been careful to stop exposing herself and this is considered *gunah*. Adar Bibi, an elderly Gujjar comments,

*For girls to come out of the house is a big sin . But our people do not understand it and girls do go out alone. Those people, who are well-read in Qur’an, abide by it while illiterate (anpar) ones do not abide by it.*

Saleema, a 14 year old Dodhi Gujjar girl says,

*In our religion (mazhab), it is forbidden for girls to wear any make-up so as to avoid the wrath of Allah..We also need to wear a duppata for covering our head and chest part so as to avoid any gaze.*

It is true that we found women and girls with minimum make up, although they love to wear some artificial or fake jewellerys generally made of silver, like a silver earring or a small neckpiece made of bronze or silver. Their notion of maintaining one’s beauty is by not putting anything on the face except this particular eye makeup called *surma* which is generally sold in the market. The *surma* according to them is *sunnat*. There is a popular story which many of the Gujjar girls like to narrate whenever there is the discussion of beauty and make-up. Zarina a young Gujjar girl narrates,

*A young Muslim girl used to put on make-up like lipstick and nail polish and eye makeup etc. She also did not cover her hair properly with a head scarf. Later when she died, she got burned in hell (dozak) where her eyes were taken out, lips, hair and nails removed. Though she cried and asked for forgiveness and mercy, it was not considered and she was left unpardoned for her disobedience.*

Parents and elders often tell their children this story so that they are warned from a young age the implications for such disobedience. The girls often claim that they fear

the wrath of Allah and so abide to whatever restrictions are given. Zatoon like any other Gujjars girl says,

*“It is all Allah’s wish and Allah’s mercy that I am living this life. Allah controls everything, good and bad, so I fear Allah.”*

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the intricate relations of the human world with that of the spirit world which exist in the minds of the people. The attributes of the spirits are seen in alignment with human beings, sharing characteristics like good and bad, knowledgeable and illiterate and so on. Another aspect is the way the spirits controls the humans in terms of inflicting their malevolent effects which create fear and awe in the minds of people. In the effort to solve to such problems, people turn to various mediums. The prevalence of these many spirits is because of their lifestyle which is predominantly associated with the jungles where these spirits are also frequent. For an objective and rational mind these are reflections of fears anxieties and disliking dispositions due to restrictions imposed on their movements, forced settlements and interference of non-Muslims. Often the conversations of their everyday life revolve around trying to do good, and to speak good than doing evil or speaking wrongly. In this way, their mundane activities turn into a ‘field’ for fulfilling all these expectations, as a man, woman or as a sheep and goat rearer or a buffalo rearer, a milk man or woman and so on. The symbolic structures consisting of ideas of Allah, *Shaitan*, *Jannat*, *Jahanum* create permanent moods and motivations (fear of punishment and reward; ideas of good vs evil; obedience and disobedience etc) in people that produce appropriate behaviour and psychological experiences. These

symbolic structures keep influencing in the manner in which the people adopt to the world they themselves have constructed. The Gujjars constantly keep interacting with these *models of reality* in executing the ideology and carrying out the everyday activities. Looking at the interaction of how people manipulate or try to live their everyday lives, in connection with the larger symbol structures, is what constitutes the *model of* aspect of religion. Without manipulating the symbol structures, people will cease to have a sense of direction, to function as appropriate human beings, which their religious worldview demands. It is also with the manipulation of symbol structures that they tend to create and recreate alternate ways of fitting with the pre-established non-symbolic structures. The *dargah* piety of Gujjars shows their necessity to connect to Allah though it not subscribed in the Qu'ran.

## Chapter 6

### Disparities in Faith and Practice

*Where there once was faith, there now are reasons, and not very convincing ones; what once was deliverances are hypotheses, and rather stained ones. (Geertz 1968:17)*

#### Introduction

When it comes to interpreting the practice of Islam in different cultures, the general methodology adopted is to find ‘ideal’ or doctrinal commands and the way Islam is ‘lived out’ in everyday lives<sup>1</sup>. When Geertz says the following he refers to the former sense of religion.

“Religion is never merely metaphysics. For all peoples the forms, vehicles, and objects of worship are suffused with an aura of deep moral seriousness. The holy bears within it everywhere a sense of intrinsic obligation: it not only encourages devotion, it demands it; it not only induces intellectual assent, it enforces emotional commitment.” (Geertz 1973: 126).

But for several others, the latter part is significant where various expressions are displayed by the adherents whose lives revolve around belief in a set of standard norms to be followed, and practice, displayed by bodily expressions or actions. But the gap in between remains untouched. There is a need to reason out why ‘lived out’

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars of comparative religion like to distinguish between two manifestations of religion. They contrast the higher or ideal forms of the religion (in our case, formal Islam) with the lower or most popular forms (folk Islam) (Eller 2007: 21). It cannot be denied that folk Islam developed out of constant influence of other beliefs and practices in the vicinity which people chose to assimilate over a course of time. It can also be termed as syncretic practice which according to Das “is a matter of degree,-some societies have blended prominent aspects of two religious dogmas, in others only certain aspects of the original or adopted religion/sect has been retained and internalized” (2010:220).

Islam deviates from the 'ideal' form. I also feel the practice of religion is not just lived out. It is more than that when we apply the field theory of Bourdieu (1977). Religious field is the field of forces as any other field acting upon individuals and groups under the historical experiences and power relations. The forces of religious interpretations of the specialists who enforce the dogma and rules and the affluent who subscribe to those views intersect on the religious views of the common believers and the marginal. The latter based on certain internalized values exhibit dispositions, but the individual as a conscious being do reflect on the religious impositions and behave accordingly. At another level though religion is integrative it also provides room for division, alternative views when certain dogmas or interpretations are questioned. The practice of religion examines religious behaviour in a deeper way taking account of possibilities and causative factors for dissent and compliance.

Islam, generally perceived to be a monotheistic religion with a more or less uniform formal structure and practices have in fact many layers of practice when we do a cross cultural analysis. This is where our concern as anthropologists lay. Also, the 'sacred' character attached to these beliefs and practice is something we are concerned along with looking into aspects where this sacred is given less importance and people *manipulate* it. This causes dissent among the adherents of the faith, who are same yet different in their doctrinal practices<sup>2</sup>. This can be particularly visible among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The general contention among Muslims is with regard to the different sects and also different schools of thought within the sects. In India, most Muslims are Sunnis,

One of the anthropological concerns of understanding practice of religion among the Gujjars is about who controls the aspect of piety - what is the right way to approach God and who should be approached? Is it the *pir* or the *moulvis* who should be given more importance? Also dissent may arise between the *murid* (disciples) of different *pirs* whom they follow, the competition over the doctrinal practices and their validity. In the following discussion we will look into how lifestyle situations also play a role in determining who is a better Muslim and nomadic life vis-à-vis settled lifestyle. Here issues concerning right and wrong practices respectively deemed explanation as Islamic and unislamic. Analysis of the comparisons among themselves, as Dodhi Gujjars, Desi Gujjars and Bakarwals and also vis-à-vis the other Muslims in the region help address these questions. Also their outlook towards people of other faith further bring to the forefront their religious worldview and how they as Muslims situate themselves in the midst of all the other people who practice different faiths. All these bring out the intricacies of faith, authority and practice, which are so much intertwined in their lives.

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mostly affiliated with the Hanafi Legal school. Also, the Shafi Legal school prevails in southern India (Campo 2009:350). In recent years there has been the influence of the Hanbali law from Saudi Arabia. In contrast, Shias constitute around 10 percent of Muslims in India.

<sup>3</sup> Gujjars also belong to different schools of thought such as Deobandi and Barailwi groups, or the Wahabbi and the non-Wahabbi sects rather than being ethnically motivated. The origin of the Deoband group is from Deoband, Uttar Pradesh (Campo 2009:192-93). The Deobandi curriculum follows the Hanafi legal school, which draws on the Qu'ran and the Hadith more. They are opposed to practices like saint veneration, but not totally opposed to all forms of Sufi devotion ( Bowen 2012: 28)

## Being Sunni Muslims

A series of acts and events mark their gradual socialization of becoming a true Muslim. Gujjars often say, “*We are sunni muslims as we believed by listening*” when asked about the category of Islam that they belong to. The word ‘sunni’ according to them is taken from the word *sunn kar* which means “by listening”. So, for them, they became Sunni by listening. The teachings that had been imparted over the centuries from the Qur’an and other sources, which their forefathers have heard and they too have heard inspired them to accept Islam and so they are Sunni Muslims<sup>4</sup>. The actual understanding of what Sunni Islam is, however, quite different. Sunni in Arabic refers to “habit” or “usual practice” and is referred to the sayings and living habits of the Prophet Muhammad. The Gujjar’s understanding reveals that they are not very clear with the idea of Sunni and so they offer a different conception. We can only decipher this conception by examining how they as Sunni Muslims ‘live out’ their religion.

One popular phrase they like to highlight to any outsider is, “*I am a Musalman and I am proud to be one*”. Also they assert that all Muslims are one, even those who speak a different language and go to the *masjid* showing that they all belong to the same brotherhood of Islam. However, they also talk about the divisions of Islam into two *firke* (sects)-Shia and Sunni. Gujjars being Sunni Muslims explain that they are in one way different from the Shias as they are the direct followers of the Qur’an and the Prophet and his teachings, the Hadith. They assert that they as Sunnis do not go

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<sup>4</sup> Sunni in Arabic actually refers to “habit” or “usual practice”. It is way of living like the Prophet Muhammad and doing what he said.

beyond these revelations and confirm strictly to these aspects of Islam. Most of them do not have a clear idea of who the Shias are and generally do not have a high opinion about them. They maintain exclusivity when it comes to Shias, as they do not want to be associated with them.

The Gujjars learn about their religion, about Allah, through *masjids* and *madrassas* which are the centres for development of their faith. Socialization of children at home by the parents in religious teachings helps in building faith in Islam at a young age. *Moulvis* and *pirs* too play an important role in educating people in *ruhani ilm* (spiritual knowledge) ( See Plate no. 17 and Plate no.18).

Gujjars very confidently affirm their faith. They often say,

*Our religion is the best! And we are what we do in terms of our daily rituals that please Allah. So when we keep our rituals in order and follow it faithfully, we are good Muslims.*

Lal Din, a sixty-year-old Dodhi Gujjar from Riyasi district of Jammu, expresses his view with regard to belief in spiritual beings sitting in his wooden charpoy and smoking from the *hookah* he says the following:

*We fear Allah on one hand and on the other hand we also fear certain supernatural beings which are not as powerful as Allah but are powerful enough to cause harm to human beings.*

It is true that their foremost source of faith is Allah and the Qu'ran, and to follow the basic tenets of Islam, because they are Muslims. They find it compatible that within the larger domains of the spiritual world, there are various beings, threatening human lives but less powerful as compared to Allah's power. They consider themselves powerless in the presence of such invisible beings and thus seek divine intervention.

The endorsement of the presence of supernatural is profound among the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars and Bakarwals who often pass through the mountains for their seasonal migration and have a greater degree of fear about such beings. They seem to have been caught up between life and death, with ordinary and supernatural; with illness and health; with success and failure and with their helplessness and powerlessness with regard to the unseen. While for the rest these aspects of fear and awe with regard to supernatural beings are not serious matters that they should worry about. This is where the problem among them starts as the way they try to resolve problems differ among groups and individuals in particular.

For Muhammad a 70 year old Dodhi Gujjar who is an ardent believer and is strict about reading the Qur'an and prayer, the religion is for obedience to God. It is not about evil spirits. His concern is to be a good human being who will be honoured and rewarded by God. He says,

*When we leave this world, there is nothing like poor or rich as everyone will be heading in the same path and there is only one way. We have all come from dust and so we will all become dust. In this world there is only one Allah who will take the test of the good and the bad. For those who do wrong, Allah says to them, my son do what you want to do, but whatever you do remember that you are going to be tested by me. Just like a father who brings up his daughter or son well by providing every needs and in turn the daughter/son forget to love him back, similarly Allah feels the same if we do not obey Him. He has given us everything. Everyone in this world should think that we are going to Allah and nothing else. We do lot of good and bad things but evil is persistent more today.*

The above statement shows their devotion towards Allah and the dual categorization of people into two types- good and bad which is so common in their everyday vocabulary of faith, through which they evaluate themselves. To become a good

Muslim is the primary goal of a person, rather than to be a bad one whose end will be severely tragic without the blessings of Allah. The analogy of Allah as a father, who cares for the children, also is reflected deeply in their lives as nomads, as men and women who are struggling in the present times, due to various issues socio-economic reasons. They strongly uphold the idea that they are here in this world for a short time and that Allah controls everything. In this way it is their prime duty to please Allah. This is a difficult task as there are different perceptions as to how one can reach Allah or please Him.

#### **“Same yet different”: Non-uniform religious expressions among the Gujjars**

There are some points of dissension amongst them with regard to their professed and practiced religion<sup>5</sup>. Like for instance there are Gujjars who call themselves Wahabbi<sup>6</sup> - who according to the non- Wahabbi Gujjars, are those who do not believe in the Prophet Muhammad. The former do not accept this accusation and retort by justifying that they give highest regard to Prophet Muhammad but they cannot go to the dead saints to pray like the latter do. For the Gujjars they know a lot about the Wahabbis than the other sects.

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<sup>5</sup> This is not an unusual phenomenon especially when it comes to major world religion like Islam where there are controversies surrounding its worldview and the practices by its adherents often clash.

<sup>6</sup> As we know that Islam follows two schools of thought viz., Shias and Sunnis schools of thought (Madani 1993). They are supposed to follow the *sunnat* of their Prophet as a guide but they seem to have added more words and ways which have damaged some of the Sunnat and have harmed Islam (*ibid*: 34). The Sunnis have developed their school of thought from four Imams. In the already existing differences, different schools of thought came forward like the Wahabbis in Arabia, the Ahmadies in Pakistan and Bahhies in Iran (*ibid*:35).

Many of them justify that like in a family not all brothers are same. Likewise, even among the Muslims there are differences and oppositions as to how people practice Islam. Most of the people are taught by different schools of thought. So those who are taught by the Deoband Ulama, generally call themselves as Wahabbi and even among them there are differences. Most of the Deoband Muslims are Wahabbi and among the Gujjars, the Dodhi Gujjars follow the Deoband teachings more. These Gujjars are called Bawar Gujjar, Chechi Gujjar, Khatana Gujjar, according to their *zat*. The Bakarwals on the other hand mostly belong to the Barelwi group that gives more importance to *pir* reverence.

When it comes to the everyday religious discussions among individuals or groups within Gujjar community, there seem to be conflicting discourses on what is to be 'ideal Islam' i.e., what a true Muslim should do or how he/she should behave. Anything falling short of the 'ideal' criteria is deemed improper for a Muslim and invokes strict criticism. The ideas which are deemed Islamic are that where people keep all the precepts laid down by the Islam - the Qu'ran and the Hadith. There are so many different ways by which the Gujjars scrutinize each other's practice of living out Islam, which brings out the essence of the subject or the agent looks at the other subjects within a wide 'social field' in which they live.

In the above context, several Gujjars follow the tradition of *pir* reverence, which though a Sufi element, the Gujjars reject saying that it has nothing to do with Sufism. They do not associate themselves with the mystical elements of Sufism or the Rishi

movement which involves dancing and praying in trance and singing Sufi songs<sup>7</sup>. Only *pir* reverence is a popular practice that many Gujjars passionately follow. The reverence towards the *pir* is an issue that has been already dealt in the fourth chapter. What is to be focused is the mixed views regarding their outlook towards *pir* i.e., ‘to follow’ or ‘not to follow’ the *pir* are expressed basing themselves on the scriptures. Most of the Gujjars unquestionably assert that it is to God that all praises and credit should go but they also acknowledge *pirs* and *dargahs* as important agents to reach the Almighty. They are in such awe of Allah, whom they believe knows every language and nothing is hidden from Allah. They say

*“apni dil se jo bhi mange aur apne bhasha se jo bhi mangho, who saab bhasha ko samaj te hein voh.”*  
(Whoever asks from his/her heart, God understands all)

They note again, that it is when they go to the *dargahs* that their prayers are truly answered.

*“Allah tala hamare doa suunte hein. Yaha ghar ke andar bhi sunenge, magar dargah par hi ziada suunte hein.”*

They believe that God listens to their prayer in their homes but more so when they pray in a *dargah*. They further observe that whatever prayer they make in the *pir’s* name, God fulfils it. This is how they are supposed to pray in the *dargah*,

*“Allah, pir ke hazari kobul karke fazal karo, mere beemari door karo, mera janwaro ko thik karo, mere safar mein kamyabi doh.”*

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<sup>7</sup> We find through literature and existing monuments like sufi *masjids* and shrines in Srinagar that Kashmiri muslims are more oriented towards Sufism. Reverence to shrines and *pirs* are quite common among Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir however the Kashmiri takes it to another level where there is the presence of Sufi tradition. They visit Sufis and the Rishi shrines which are found in every nook and corner of the valley of Kashmir (Khan 2005).

(Allah, accepts the presence of the *pir* and bless me, make me well and my cattle well, give me journey mercies)

Many are critical of those who do not adhere to the *pir* and the *dargah* and comment saying,

*“na-maane vale voh toh mulku hote hein...voh toh kisika nahi hota.”*

(Those who do not believe in *pir* are bad and they do not belong to anyone)

They believe that the *pir* is interceding for them with the following prayer, saying,

*“Khuda...jo mera hogaya oh unka hogaya.”*

(God...whoever is mine has become yours.)

The above expressions show their strong adherence to the institution of *pir*, who for them is an important agent to reach Allah. The *pir* is the person who has pleased God and belongs to Him. For them, Allah also acknowledges the *pir* that he now belongs to people endowed with power and authority, and that he is accessible to people as much as God Himself. The justification of such belief of showing deep reverence to the *pir* is supported by their statement that the Qur'an mentions that whoever belongs to the *pir* belongs to God and belonging to God means everything in the universe coming under the authority and control of the *pir*. They say,

*“hamare Qur'an Pakh mein likha hoa he ki jo 'mara hogaya voh uska hogaya...uska hogaya matlab saab kayinath mein ajatehein, uski nigah mein saab kuch beegri banja te hein.”*

(In our Holy Qu'ran it is written that whoever dies becomes His...to become 'his' means all the universe comes under him, in his sight all the broken things becomes alright)

When things of the universe come under the authority of the *pir* he makes the broken things alright. The order is restored from disorder; health is restored from sickness; happiness is restored from sadness. But this statement is under dispute for critics say that such things are not mentioned in the Qu'ran. Many believe that all these are just ways to distract people from worshipping Allah directly. Those who are fully into the system feel that the system of *pir* reverence has its own challenges. Ali, one of the *murid* of Mian Bashir, the famous Gujjar *pir* in Jammu, says that he does not visit *dargahs*. Rather he is a follower of the living *pir*, who for him is a genuine *wali* of Allah. He further says,

*In this world there are two kinds of things, original and duplicate. Many do not know the difference. Even with pir there is this tension. Some pirs are there who do some black magic to make some spirits do some harm on people while some pirs are there who act spiritual but are not, so these people are there to extract money from people. For Allah's guardian (wali) even if lakhs of money come and go they do not care.*

From the above it is clear that *pirs* are suspected of black magic and other motives which are not of Islamic traditions. The differences among them are due to sectarian factors which is an accepted reality. Many Gujjars advise that as a Muslim one should be careful when one visits *dargah* not to ask anything from the dead saint or offer flowers or kneel down and pray to the *pir* of the *dargah*. They say that if such things are done all the credit would go to the dead saint's soul which is not correct. But, there are many people like Mohammad Israel a 70 year old Gujjar who does not like the idea of visiting *dargah* and *pir*. He calls himself a Wahabbi Musalman who just believes in Allah and not in any mediator. He says,

*Allah has given message that healing is in His hands. We can go to the doctor and get medicines but the 'one who saves' (bacchanewale) is him.*

*God is the healer and forgiver (shafa dene wale) as well as the taker of life (maut dene vale).*

In the above statement absolute power has been given to God and the secular knowledge of healing available with the doctors is acknowledged. People should depend only on God and the doctors but not the *pirs*. Wahabbis strongly condemn the practice of visiting the *pirs* and we find that reflection even in Israel's following comments once again,

*There is nothing but mud (mitti) in their head among those who go to visit dargah. They go to graves and pray and ask for favours to the dead. Going to graves should have a meaning i.e to pray to Allah for the forgiveness of their sins/gunah and ask for their favours regarding securing a place for them in paradise (jannat) for them and protection from hell. It is written in the Holy Qur'an that one should pray for the souls of the dead saints so that they may have a place in paradise and should not ask for favours from them nor should go to the dargahs and offer flowers or bow down in front of them. This is God's command. If one wishes to go and visit the pir's grave one should make up his/her mind not to ask anything to the pir but should go with this thing in mind that he is God's 'chosen one' (pyare) and one should just pray to God than to the dead pir.*

This is an unambiguous statement declaring that belief in *pir* is unIslamic, and at the same time it states that the only goal of a Muslim is to go to paradise and for that there is only way is, forgiveness of sins from Allah only. Thus it has been found out that there are several oppositions to the *pir* reverence. According to many Bakarwals, the opposition is coming from the Dodhi Gujjars more than others. Such opposition is held among them because of the following theological teachings of Islam. According to Shariah the Sajdah is divided into two types: *Sajdah al Tazeemi* (reverence) and *Sajdah al Ibadah* (worship). *Sajdah* should be given only to Allah and to no one else. The main reason for justification by those people opposing it is that the first pillar of Islam - The First Kalima (Kalima of Islam) says,

*“There is none worthy of worship but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger.”*

The second Kalima (Testification) says,

*“There is none worthy of worship but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is Allah's worshipper and Messenger.”*

The third Kalima (Glorification of Allah) says,

*“Glory be to Allah and All praise be to Allah and There is none worthy of worship but Allah and Allah is the greatest and there is no power and might except from Allah. The Most High, The Great.”*

They also justify further pointing out specific verses from the Qur'an like,

Allah says in the Qur'an in under Surah Al Fatihah - verse 5,

*“You (alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything).”*

Allah says in the Qu'ran:

*“Most of them believe not in Allah except that they attribute partners unto Him”*  
(The Holy Qu'ran, Chapter 12, Verse 106)<sup>8</sup>

An elderly Bakarwal has mentioned that there is no way a person can reach to God unless through a mediator and that is a *pir*. When asked about their reverence to *pir*, the Bakarwals admitted that they do not pray to the *pir* for any favours but they offer prayers to God taking the *pir*'s name so that their prayers will be answered. The above discussion shows the contention within the brotherhood of believers about *pir* reverence which leads to disunity within, the community of Muslims among the Gujjars.

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<sup>8</sup> For further references see ( Sarvar 2012)

Some of the Gujjars are also found to resort to many local beliefs and practices which cause dissent among them. We find so many divergent versions of so called Islamic practices within communities<sup>9</sup>, which are at the same time deemed unislamic within the group because they are not in accordance with the Qu’ran or the Prophetic traditions. In this aspect particular focus can be drawn to the sacred symbols<sup>10</sup>, which are part of any religious community but all people do not show same reverence for the sacred symbols.

### **Attitudes, criticisms within the community regarding faith and practice**

There are several differences in their outlook towards their faith, the practices of an ‘ideal’ Islam, where people have their own versions of following and practicing their religion. The problem arises when they start to identify their outlook towards their faith saying “*We do things differently than them*”. This requires a close enquiry on the differences and the dissent therein. We find differences in the way the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars and Bakarwals look at each other even though they seem to be very similar in terms of their social and cultural practices. Bakarwals think that they are more genuine in their devotion to their faith, their family and tradition. They admit that they are highly protective of their children especially their daughters and see that they do not go out without properly covering head and with a female companion. They also accuse the Dodhi Gujjars of being liberal in allowing

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<sup>9</sup> Gilsnan also examines that one of the problems involving Islam in practice is that it is inextricably bound up with many dimensions of social life, in ways that are frequently not at all what they initially appear to be (1982).

<sup>10</sup> Sacred symbols function to synthesize a people’s ethos and their world view (Geertz 1973:89).

their daughters to venture alone to sell milk in the market and without proper veiling which they feel are not in accordance to the Qu'ranic law. The latter, however, disagree with such allegations and claim that their daughters dress modestly and cover their head. While for the former, women are strictly prohibited from going out alone and do not associate with men freely.

The Dodhi Gujjars in general find the distinction between them and Bakarwals in terms of reverence given to *pirs*. Many Dodhi Gujjars who claim to be Wahabbi do not like the idea of the necessity of a mediator to reach out to God. But ironically almost all the Gujjars are more or less influenced by belief in a variety of spirits and myths, and often are in awe and fear of the malevolent nature of spirits. To counter the attacks of the spirits they wear *tawiz*, visit the *pirs* who aids them by uttering chants which involves *phook marna* (blowing of breath) on the sick person or animal, touching the affected body part and so on. For them all these are techniques which are allowed by a Muslim. On the other hand, the Gujjars who call themselves Wahabbi are annoyed with such practice and condemn the belief in *pirs* saying that it is against the Qu'ran or the Hadith. An elderly Gujjar said that they not go to *dargahs* nor believe in any spiritual beings like *jinns*. He said that he is just a firm believer of Allah and stated that He is the only one to be given *ibadat* (worship). Bakarwals claim that despite them not having the opportunity to go to *masjid* due to their nomadic lifestyle, all they do is remember Allah in the hearts, which is also acceptable.

For the past two or three decades a number of pastoral nomads are slowly turning to semi-nomadism and settled life and we find some changes in some practices that has

led to some kind of tension within the community. The settling of pastoral nomads are either forced upon them by the state or many times they themselves eventually acquire lands and have settled down and are also employed in different jobs. These are Desi Gujjars, who even though do not undertake the seasonal migration anymore keep alive their tradition of keeping buffaloes in small numbers for their use to make some extra income by selling milk. The practice of religion among the settled communities has been influenced by non-Islamic traditions. Unlike among the nomads the using of words like *pooja* for prayer or *bhagwan* for God which are generally used by the local Hindu population are found among those who have settled. This also shows a kind of assimilation of cultural terms that have happened with gradual contact with the local dominant cultures<sup>11</sup>. Desi Gujjars have a prejudice towards those who are still practicing the nomadic lifestyle are not clean and doing their role as Muslims properly. They consider that Islam is a religion that propagates cleanliness while those who are with cattle and roaming the whole day in dirt and exposing themselves to various influences, does not keep up to it.

The Gujjars are also critical of the ways how they as Muslims are living and behaving. Though one side we find them being high on their allegiance towards their religion, yet on the other side they also admit their shortcomings in terms of living out their faith and allegiance. According to them, many people including Gujjars

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<sup>11</sup> Gujjars live side by side with other communities like the Dogras and Kashmiri Pandits who follow Hinduism and also the Punjabi Sikhs living in the area. One theory regarding their past is that that originally the Gujjars were Hindus (most of the scholars and even the common people agree to that) and over the years they gradually accepted Islam and so traces of their former beliefs and practices still manifest.

have taken Allah lightly and compromised in several ways. Cheating, lying and showcasing of false religious behaviour are some of the problems they reveal. This includes skipping the daily *namaz* and the *roza* during the holy month of Ramzan; some people are even eating non-*halal* food in hotels when they travel and eat food cooked by Hindus and also disrespecting women and young girls by staring at them and passing comments. All these are considered as *gunah*.

Many of them would also mention that young Gujjar men and women are not very strict in their adherence to their faith and performing their religious duties. They attribute this to the growing influence of media, mobile phones, and even television which has hampered their relationship with God and the community traditions. Young men and women are considered lazy and not accountable, unlike the older generation who are hardworking and accountable. Today suspicion and jealousies lurk the minds of people that has come as a result of the growing influence of outside elements on the people. This breeds hatred and quarrel within their community. Despite the fact that Gujjars, which includes Dodhi, Desi and Bakarwal, are all Muslims and claim that they are all one as brothers in Allah's sight being *musalman*, there prevails an ambience of aversion towards each other in terms of their practices. There is always claim and counter claim who is a better Muslim, and the present scenario is an outlook that the other's practice are inferior compared to theirs.

### **Travelling people and travelling faith**

Among the Gujjars, there is the assumption that Prophet Muhammad himself was from a tribe that kept cattle and moved from one place to another. The community

later settled to engage in trade and business. This drew them to an identity with the Prophet<sup>12</sup>. Also, they compare their tradition of keeping herds and physical movement with that of the traditions of most of the Prophets in the Qu’ran like *Musa* (Moses), *Ibrahim* (Abraham) and many others, who were nomads. In the course of their physical migration they share experiences of how they keep their faith strong. The idea of a sovereign God is quite appealing to pastoral nomads whose basic need is a survival strategy with no fixed or non-perishable property or wealth. For instance if the cattle dies it is a loss for them or if there are no good fodder then life becomes harder. For them their cattle is everything and if it is affected the well being of the entire *dera* or *kafila* gets affected. From the start of journey till the end, they depend on Allah’s favour for good health of the family and cattle, good weather on the way and favourable passage as they traverse their ancestral routes that they have been taking for times immemorial. Here then, thinking of a powerful God who provides, protects and guides them in their journeys is part of their worldview which ultimately shapes the ethos and vice versa.

They spontaneously express their dependence on Allah in everything, either by verbal praises or exclamations like “*Allahu*” or “*Allah hu Akbar*” (God is great) in their daily ordinary conversations than having a longing to read the Qu’ran or the Hadith. The former makes more sense for them than the later which is not the most important thing for a nomad in terms of its application. They highly revere the

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<sup>12</sup> Nomadism and Islam have always been closely linked as we find that Islam was revealed in the Arabian Peninsula where the tradition of nomadism was present especially among the Arab nomads, who were desert nomads. However Muhammad, who got the divine revelation, was himself not a nomad, but a merchant of the Quraish tribe, a settled community (Norton 1924)

Qu'ran by keeping it separate from the other household things or by keeping it covered with a nice clean piece of cloth. It is a set apart object, the sacred, a taboo in Durkhemian sense. One thing also can be noted that sedentary lifestyle has again a different outlook with regard to Islam. As one acquires a settled life there seem to be a tendency to acquire a more textual perspective of religion. Also when we see *masjids*, they are actually fixed structures, in the sense that it is a gathering of people in one place, in clean clothes and with clean water and surroundings. For a nomad even in terms of practical aspects we find that the Qu'ran is not something that they would carry and read casually. Also most of them are illiterate and so they are more into listening than reading the religious text.

Transhumance includes certain practical necessities that make it difficult to fulfil certain requirements or expectations of their faith. For instance, they spent most of their time with cattle and so it is not easy for them to keep clean and perform their religious rituals effectively on time which are important for a Muslim. They must rely on the presence of a naturally flowing stream of water for *ghusal* and *wazu* before prayers. Their traditional routes which they undertake for the yearly migration offers them various difficulties like lack of water and other facilities. However, they have developed their own technique of replacing water with sand for the *wazu* before their prayers. Their lifestyle keeps them in the hills and the countryside away from towns where Islamic places of worship are located, yet the expectation of their faith is that they should offer prayers in the *masjid*, especially on *Jumah*. Someone must always be with the animals so it is difficult for many to reach the *masjid* for even Friday prayers. They do their best to build a *masjid* even near their remote pasturage,

but this is often not feasible during their seasonal migration. Some of them occasionally skip their *namaz* or even their *roza* during holy month of Ramadan when they are on migration or are in long journey of selling milk. In these cases we find that transhumance creates a flexible format for the community in following the various religious obligations as they are not in the convenient places to undertake all the rituals.

As part of their tradition of moving with their cattle, it is necessary to keep guard dogs. In this we find an odd tension existing as dogs are regarded as unclean according to the Islamic faith and yet they are needed for protecting their livestock and property from predators, both animal and human. Also, many times, cleanliness is not on priority for the pastoral nomads as most of the time their children were found playing in dirt and mud and with the cattle, playing with the young ones of a buffalo or the lambs and ewes. Bathing is not an everyday luxury that they can afford with the scarcity of water in the vicinity and they do not consider it essential. Therefore, they will go for days without having a bath, especially during their seasonal migration and also once they are settled down. During the course of their migration, they often visit a number of small Muslim *dargahs* where they offer their prayers for a safe journey and well being of their *dera*. Such prayer at the *dargahs* also gives them the opportunity of praying when there is no *masjid* around and the *dargahs* help them connect with Allah once again.

Any religion based on the textual tradition, thrives or flourishes among the settled population mostly as it involves a space for learning, where people can gather, learn together. It also needs to have specific timings and place to meet, a person who is

constantly available to guide and teach the people. These requisites are difficult for nomads who are mostly on the move. For them the idea of settling down does not appeal to their minds firstly because their life is centered on their cattle and for them they undertake the tedious migration. Following religious rituals in the “right order” does not seem to be the top most priority for them as it is something which they cannot manage. They are compelled to develop some adaptive strategies. They do not oppose structures like a *masjid* that they see in the course of their migration, yet they also do not make use of them. Though mandatory to be a part of it, they find an excuse that they have to travel. Their concern is mainly their livelihood and living out their faith simply, performing some of the mandatory rituals as per their convenience.

Another important aspect to be considered is that the tedious long journeys that they have to cover together with their family and kin strengthens their ethnic identity as a group. This kind of community favours reinforcement of kinship bonds more than the bonds that they share with other Muslims of the area. In this context one either acquires or is forced to take up a settled life, kinship ties become weaker and also the traditional dependency on each other for survival is reduced as they are now more focused in one place, to make their houses, and becoming self sufficient rather than dependant on kinship relations. Further, their ideas of faith became more structured as mentioned above. In a fixed place of residence they can worship where water is available for their religious cleanliness and also there are interactions with their neighbours and people of other faiths which in the process also bring many changes in their worldview.

## **Outlook towards other Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir**

Gujjars associate every Muslim with the brotherhood of Islam to get a sense of unity for the believers of the faith which is called the *Ummah*. Those Gujjars who have had the privilege to go to Mecca, have often mentioned that they were amazed at the number of Muslims they saw and felt good that there were so many people from different countries who believed in Allah. In Jammu and Kashmir, followers of Islam are many not only Kashmiri Muslims but also others from different parts of the country. They always make a comparison with the Kashmiri Muslims and often talk about the Kashmiri lifestyle, their sense of clothing, piety in religion, cuisine, their art of making fine tea (*qawa*) and arrangement of house. They mostly look up to the Kashmiris in terms of their faith and allegiance towards Allah, as people who are strict in their religious observances, and also living in areas surrounded by *masjids* and *khanqahs*<sup>13</sup>. Whenever they get a chance, they attend the *masjid* along with the rest of the Muslims in the vicinity, where they also get to meet the Kashmiris.

Though at one level, Gujjars would like to associate themselves with other Muslims of the region, like the Kashmiri Muslims in general the Kashmiri Muslims behave in such a way that the Gujjars are made to feel inferior in all matters. Their lifestyle includes certain practical necessities that make it difficult to fulfill certain requirements or expectations of their faith as the Kashmiri Muslims feel necessary for a believer. As mentioned above their lifestyle is considered 'unclean' and without any strict discipline in carrying out the religious rituals necessary for a Muslim.

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<sup>13</sup> Shrines attached with learning centres.

Some of these aspects like keeping dogs, living with cattle, skipping *jumah*, visiting *dargah* and being illiterate, especially not knowing how to read Arabic and lack of even Urdu literacy leading to inability to acquaint themselves with Urdu religious literature, are seen as a severe hindrance to their faith. One reason for this is their tradition of physical movement which did not give them the opportunity to read and write like settled communities would often do. For them there was no option, rather they have founded their knowledge through interaction and oral communication. It has been remarked by certain influential Kashmiri leaders that Gujjars do not understand the Urdu properly and so they cannot avail themselves of Islamic teachings published in Urdu. While many affluent Gujjars as well as Kashmiri Muslims oppose the visits to Ajmer Sharif in lieu of Mecca and Urs at different places the Bakarwals find nothing unIslamic in such a practice. In this way also oppositions are created leading to the existence of certain assumed prejudices between both Gujjars and Kashmiris. Also, the general afflictions felt by the Gujjars in terms of poverty, health, poor education as well as the harsh environments in which they live may be seen by them as afflictions by Allah due to their lack of religious seriousness. This again makes them feel inferior to Kashmiris and other more blessed people. They also share stories of how many times while undertaking their seasonal migration; they sometimes faced threats and insults from the local Kashmiris which makes their travel difficult. They say,

*“hum logo ko raaste mein gali dete hein, mar pit karte hein, hamara maal chori karte hein...ye aisi zabardasti kai log karte hein hamare saat...pehle zamane mein aman ka zamana tha..us vakat log kam tha..Bakarwalo ke saath bahut ziaakti hote hein aaj...”*

(we are often scolded on the way, they fight with us, our cattle get stolen...people forcefully do all this to us..In the past there was peace...there were less people then...lot of injustice happens to us Bakarwals)

These are some of the current challenges they face during their movements, over their right to move in the same physical routes which they have been using since several generations. Today space is an issue which they grapple with as they move around with hundreds of goats and sheep, facing the taunts and unwelcome gaze from people around them. They remember those days when there was peace and even freedom for them as they moved in these routes.

They Gujjars do critically evaluate their Muslim neighbours in terms of their actions as Muslims. They often talk about the struggle that is going on in the valley of Kashmir and state. They are not against the political struggle, but they disapprove the crimes that are committed in the process. They are concerned over the killings in Kashmir by their brethren, and consider them as *kafirs*<sup>14</sup>, for their violent behaviour towards their own fellow beings. They show anger and frustration over the entire matter. Their taking up terrorism as a solution to the problems has been understood as the consequence of frustration on the vexing issue of autonomy.

An elderly Gujjar remarks,

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<sup>14</sup> The word *Kufr* was used originally, which translates “more accurately as unbelief..” See El Guindi (2008:107). The word *Kufr* basically means disbelief in any of the articles of Faith in Islam. The articles of Faith are: to believe in Allah, His angels, His messengers, His revealed Books, The Day of resurrection, and Al-Qadar, Divine Preordainments (Khan and Al Hilali 1999 : 904)

*In Srinagar the terrorists are killing girls and children; do they have mercy in their hearts? Does the religion teach us to kill children and young girls? These people call themselves as Musalman but they are actually kafir. A Hindu will never do such things. May be one in hundred do it but in general Hindus are better than the Musalmans.*

They sympathise with those who are going through the perils of such inhuman activities in Kashmir and condemn the violation. They are not sympathizing with the Kashmiris because of their religious background of being Muslims but they are one with them who understand their grievances as human beings. They also make an important point regarding their Hindu counterparts. When it comes to truly acknowledging their position, they would not hesitate to exalt others as well, which shows their outlook towards other's faith. They hear the news of the events in Kashmir from the transistors and nowadays, through the television. They condemn Kashmiri militants for the heinous acts they have committed over the years by saying that such should not be the attitude of Muslims. Abdul, an elderly Gujjars remark,

*You know, a musalman's (Muslim) heart has been spoilt (bigargaya). In Srinagar the Mujjahid (terrorist) are killing women and children; do they have mercy in their hearts? Does the religion teach us to kill children and young girls? These people call themselves as musalman but they are actually kafirs because of what they are doing.*

This bold statement of the elderly Gujjar man reveals a mixture of emotions on the issue of religious affiliation, regionalism and the idea of a good/bad human being. The accusation of *kafirs* shows their open criticism leveled against their fellow believers who have taken up arms and conflict. The Gujjars do not favor the militants because of the various atrocities they have inflicted on them, as they encountered

them during their seasonal migration on the high altitudes. They believe that as Muslims, they are not supposed to kill Allah's creation and it is a big *gunah*.

### **Perceptions about people of other faiths**

Every religion differs in its theology and so the believers see themselves as distinct from the others and maintain a sense of security within by considering the other as not equivalent or good. Islam came to the region of Jammu and Kashmir around the 14<sup>th</sup> century and since then more than half the population of the region are adherents to the faith and for decades it has maintained its monotheistic tradition and ritualistic practices, which binds the community together. It has also thrived in various settings and also alongside various other religions like Hinduism, Sikhism and others. This has led to amalgamation of various beliefs and practices to some extent. There has always been an element of antagonism between Muslims and Hindus in the history of India, which has led to several social and political upheavals even today. Gujjars also maintain a strict Muslim identity and also exhibit the tendency to compare themselves with the Kashmiris Muslims whenever there is a discussion on religion. They often say that Islam is better than Hinduism and look down on various practices of the Hindus like eating non- *halal* meat, burning the body instead of burying it which when seen from their religious perspective is not appropriate. One educated Gujjar remarked,

*Hinduism is just a sanskriti (culture). It is not a religion. True religion is that which have revelations from God through books, like the Muslims with the Qur'an is the final revelation and the final book which has to be followed and nothing else.*

One elderly Gujjar remarked that people of other faith, like the Hindus are better than the Muslims. He says,

*If you go to a Hindu village, the Hindus will help you to the fullest, but Musalmans will not. There is more taras (mercy) in the hearts of Hindus than Musalmans (musalman betaras hein).*

Men also have interest in other faiths. Whenever some topic on religion comes up they like to compare themselves with Hindus more commonly and describing the latter as *patharon ko mane wala* (those who believe in stones) and look down on them. It is important to note that Gujjars in other parts of India like Rajasthan worship different deities and their food habits include eating pork and drinking alcohol. All these practices are shunned by the Muslim Gujjars of Kashmir and they view all this as an abomination. Another act that they condemn is inter-faith marriage. Gujjars who marry a Hindu are looked down upon and are expelled from the family and community, the reason being that Muslims have nothing in common with Hindus in faith and lifestyle.

With the Christians they show a certain degree of affiliation because *hazrat Isa* (Jesus) is one of their prophets but they detest the practices of Christians such as eating of pork and calling Jesus as God, which for them is the highest *gunah* one can commit. For them their religion is perfect and others have drifted away in their own ways. Of course they also maintain their pluralistic assumption that all religions are good but the best is Islam. For instance a Gujjar *pir* who reveals tolerance to people of other faiths convey the message that religions can collaborate for betterment of humanity. He mentions,

*So many Hindus come to me for treatment of various problems. I do not mind it. Doing good to others, every religion talks about it. Pir does not belong to any one religion. A pir is for every quam (tribe). It does not matter whether a Hindu or a Muslim. His work is to do good to every man.*

This kind of attitude may not be agreed upon by all Muslims as one elderly Gujjar mentions,

*Among other (gair) Muslims and saccha (true) Muslims...there is a huge difference in their practices. True Muslims will never bow down in shrines or visit a pir or offer money or flowers or incense in the shrines. They will just pray for the dead saints for their entry into paradise. Whereas there are many Muslims who also go and offer prayers by offering flowers and incense and money which is not right according to the Qur'an or the Hadith and these things are usually done by these people who are less read or are just name sake Muslims..born and brought up in Muslim household but doesn't know anything about what is written in the Qur'an and what one is supposed to do and not to do as a Muslim.*

They uphold the idea that there are counterfeit Muslims and true Muslims living together and one can identify them through their lives and action. And for them, those who are not strong in Allah tend to drift to other things and even change their faith. They show contempt for such acts and impart very harsh punishment on the perpetrator. It is rarely that people convert to other faiths. Religious conversion and inter-religious marriage is looked at with contempt. Ali (name changed), a Gujjar who is a Christian convert was rejected by his family and also ostracised by the community with the justification that he is now a *haram* (an infidel). On being asked whether he was forcibly converted, he said that it was his own personal choice and not someone's pressure. He narrates,

*After I accepted Jesus, I came up with several persecutions. I did not tell anyone as I was scared about facing persecutions but I faced it. I slowly told my wife and then my brother also saw me reading the Bible and praying. He*

*beat me up, my wife scolded me, and my father also was very unhappy with me and insulted me and beat me up. The religious people also were very angry with me and even warned to cut off my name from the family and religious affiliation. They told my wife that I was a haram for her and that I was a kafir and asked her to save herself and children from me and let him go. I was thrown out of my house, my relatives and my community rejected me. I asked them. Tell me where I am wrong? I have not hurt anyone nor committed any crime. I was asking them what crime I have committed that they are doing this to me? They were trying to change me. They even filed an FIR in the police station against me saying that I was trying to convert people from Islam to Christianity. My cousin a teenage boy was arrested by police as a suspect....and when the religious leaders approached me I openly told them yes. I am a follower of the truth and not the Christianity that you think about.*

Thus as in this case, which is so rare among them, anyone breaking the religious boundary is dealt with very seriously. Elderly Gujjars say,

*Islam is the best din (religion). All others will go to dozak (hell fire). Isai (Christians) are also closer to us as they also believe in one God. The only thing that is contradictory in their belief is that they consider Hazrat Isa (Jesus) as God, whom we consider as a prophet.*

This strong statement by an elderly Gujjar reveals their stand on their religion that it is the utmost and the best which can be quite threatening to other religions. Many in the community have a similar standpoint. They feel that they can relate better to someone who believes in *Hazrat Isa* (Jesus Christ), as they consider him as a Prophet of *Allah*, so they do not see anything bad in knowing about *Isai* (Christians). They also have certain contempt about Christians that they are people who eat pork and so are 'dirty', but interestingly they identify with the Christians on the basis that they believe in one of their prophets' i.e. *Hazrat Isa* and that Christians also bury the dead without burning the body like the Hindus do. In spite of a distinctly friendly attitude towards Hindus and Christians, the Gujjars feel threatened or insecure whenever

some Hindus or particularly people of other faith visit their locality or try to mingle with them. They are suspicious and they want to keep away from such people<sup>15</sup>.

### **Interfaith relationship**

Inter-faith relations are a vital aspect of the religious life of Gujjars, as we find dialogues between different religious groups. We also find that they do not mind reaching beyond one's religion to get a healing experience. The *khanqah* is a place of commons for the adherents of different religions and at the same time a place of 'discord' in terms of whether it is Islamic or not. The pastoral nomads especially have more access to people of other faiths via their interactions through such sacred spaces. There is also a strong network of followers of *pirs* among the Gujjars, some follow the small *pirs* who are generally local while some follow great *pirs* who have followers in thousands from different parts of the country and beyond. Discontent arises among the *murids* and followers of the *pir* as one claim superiority over the other.

Despite the fact that they look down on people of other religions, it is important to note most of them take help when in need. Since the issue of attacks by spirits is a common phenomenon among them, they do not mind seeking help from Sikhs, Hindus and Christians. They believe that there are a variety of spirits - Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh and even Buddhist spirits that torment the people. They have not mentioned about 'Christian spirits' tormenting them though they expressed that some

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<sup>15</sup>In my fieldwork, as I went there with the help of a group of people from an international NGO, we were seen as a kind of threat to their religious beliefs. One elderly Gujjar told me not to share anything about my faith to anyone in the village.

of them do visit Christians for help from certain other spirits<sup>16</sup>. The relationship with other communities also become vital as it solves many of their problems regarding inter- religious interactions. Zarina, a Dodhi Gujjar from Jammu, meet a Hindu woman once a week, and takes treatment from her for facial paralysis (See Plate no 24). She says,

*I go to her because she has the cure for my sickness. It is working well. I pay her few hundred rupees every sitting.*

Likewise, when Bibi a Dodhi Gujjar, had problems with her health, she was taken by her mother to a Sikh man, who prayed and touched her head, and she felt that she was healed. The person was paid money at the end of the service. These are just a few cases out of many where we find Gujjars taking the help of people of other faith and thereby going beyond what they as Muslims are supposed to follow. Others too come to them, especially to the *moulvis*, asking help for sickness and spirit related problems. We find in the Gujjar settlements in the plains, people from other religions like Hindus and Sikhs, visiting the *moulvi* for help. In addition, as mentioned earlier, visiting the Muslim *pir* and *dargahs* by people of other faiths are also a common phenomena. All this has also caused some dissent within the community for as not everyone encourages such practice.

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<sup>16</sup> One prominent observer of Gujjar culture and religion, Ron Ahlbrecht, have explored this aspect and have found this interesting fact which I have come across in my data collection.

## Women and Resistance

Bano was shattered when she heard the news that her son died in an accident on the way from Kashmir. She along with her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren grieved over her son's death. In remorse, after the guests were gone, she sat in one corner of the house, took out a *bidi* and smoked. This is not something unusual among the Gujjars as most of them smoke *bidi*. Similarly during another funeral where there was reading of the *khatam sharif* a group of women who were close relatives sat down together in one corner of the house, as people were busy eating and some men praying and so on. These women in their 50s were smoking *bidis*, and on being asked why they smoke, they replied, "*we are expressing our sadness over the entire situation. It is to forget this problem, the tragedy in the family.*" They do not smoke in public by sitting among men. This is mostly done while sitting with women ( See Plate 25).

This kind of attitude reveals a whole new idea of gender assertion of an identity, that their culture or religion would not allow them to. In other words, they look like moving away from the "dominant norms"<sup>17</sup> or in other words deviating from the norm. Women are supposed to behave as women and not indulge in the acts of men. It shows women's idea of resistance to the pain and suffering. Though the Islamic rules do not accept, smoking or drinking, this attitude shows that certain cultural practices are in conflict with religious values. Keeping the body clear is the basic rule of the Islamic theology. For this, the strict ritual cleansing activity of *wazu*, is in

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<sup>17</sup> as in the words of Abu-Lughod (2008: xxii).

place, before going into the presence of God for prayer. This act of smoking *bidi* brings out the other side of their worldview, which is not in coherence with what the religion adheres to.

There are other cases, where women feel that even though they too can understand and interpret the things of the supernatural, yet when it comes to sharing it with the community, their ideas are not taken seriously. Alam Bibi, a Dodhi Gujjar woman in her 40s have often mentioned her encounter with the supernatural beings like *jinn*s and claims that she is well versed in Qur'an and the Hadith. Her husband is a buffalo herder who generally stays away from home taking care of the cattle in the nearby fields, while she and her children stay in the settlement. She proclaimed herself to be a *pir*, and many women visit her for help regarding the sicknesses of their children, child bearing etc which has yielded successful results. Alam bibi often says,

*I know Arabic and therefore have the knowledge of Qur'an. People also come to me for getting their various ailments cured especially women, who have problems related to their pregnancy and others come with problems of evil spirits and so on, which I have cured by reading our kalimah and also blowing out my breathe upon them using Allah's name. I am a pir too.*

There are also cases where women are directly involved in healing practices, often considering themselves similar to *pir*. Dohi Gujjar woman from Rakh baroti settlement mentions,

*I made the jinn flee from my place by just reciting the Qur'an and praying. I have also seen angels/farishta personally and have cured people of many ailments by prayer and also giving certain medications. Many women in the village come to see me with the pretext of children's illness or their own health problems etc which I can take care. I am also like a pir who can help in curing certain ailments affecting people.*

We find here that she is defying the norm, where she is claiming herself to be a *pir*. In reality *pirs* are men only. She feels good that she is able to do these wonders which but is treated with contempt and suspicion by the locals and sometimes tagged as an evil woman who inflicts sickness and ill-luck on others<sup>18</sup>. Such women do not have an easy life as they are always the centre of gossip or discussion in the community. However, whenever they are in trouble, they do not hesitate to seek help from her. It is clear that when it comes to woman doing something in public like man, she is always questioned. Generally, if a man is found to have such qualities, than it is always taken positively and he gets due recognition and respect. In this particular case we find the woman whose husband is not an influential person, but just a simple buffalo herder. This also has an impact on the social recognition given to a woman based on her husband's status.

For instance, we find in another part of the town, among the Gujjars, the *pir's* wife is given more importance and she enjoys a respectable position because of her husband. Rano, the wife of a local Gujjar *pir* in Jammu explains that her day begins with reciting the *namaz* and then she starts her household chores, preparing the house for the guests who will be coming from the morning hours. She directs the servants what to cook for the guest, what items to be served for tea and so on. Alongside all these activities, women and girls visit her and sit in the kitchen, where she administers to their needs. She also chooses a space in the house, away from the male gaze, where

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<sup>18</sup> Sacred contagion is referred to a moral theory of connections and causes (Douglas1970: xvi). By it is meant that the members of a community manipulate each other. Among the Gujjars we find the aspects of blame for certain illness or loss to supernatural forces which is beyond their control.

women and girls who are sick with different ailments meet her. She performs *phook marna* on the ailing body parts or gives *tawiz*. She says that her husband taught her all these things. She is respected by people because of her husband's position. Thus there is not much struggle for woman like the *pir*'s wife who is in a more respectable position, compared to the ones who is poor, illiterate and whose husband does not have any social standing. It is common among them that despite displaying extraordinary skills over linkages with the spiritual, they are still less likely to go public or enjoy the equal recognition of men.

Another angle that we find in this observation is that women as actors or agents are now not just at the receiving end, but they are at the giving end, the medium through which others' needs are met. Women feel that they are also 'called out' or 'called for' such activities, which reveals a kind of soft resistance on their part against the male driven occupation and they have come up with their own techniques of meeting the needs of other women who are in distress. Another aspect of women's resistance is seen in the outlook of young Gujjar girls in their everyday attitude. Elderly Gujjars often talk about the rebellious nature of the younger generation. They often mention that girls are defying Allah in numerous ways, unlike the olden days. For instance they venture out alone without women companions, use make-up, have a casual attitude towards head covering, watch television, talk to boys casually over the phone, elope with other men, have extra marital affairs and have no respect for elders and are also casual towards the *namaz* and other religious rituals. Many point out that girls are not well versed in the teachings of the Qur'an about them, and so are rebellious. Such attitude of girls in the present times can also be attributed to a form

of rebellion against the dominant patriarchal system, where they are constantly under a male gaze and male authority. It is either the father or the brothers who are constantly watching over their movements, prescribing the norms at home for them and also restricting their movements outside. For instance, Ali a young Gujjar man laughed out when his mother tried to share something about her faith and something on the religious practices. The reason for such an attitude towards her, he says is,

*‘...because she is just a woman and she does not know anything or much about Islam’.*

Abdul, a young Gujjar boy, always enquires of his sisters going out and forbids them from talking to his friends and other male relatives. Women are seen as things that can be tarnished easily, once under the public view, and so are meant to be kept hidden. Such is the attitude towards women. Women on the other hand, continue to do what they think is best, some of them confront their fathers or brothers, but majority still chooses to submit and resist such opposition.

As it is a fact that women are excluded from most of the public spaces, like going to *masjid* or any other religious gatherings where men are always taking lead, women seem to come up with their alternate means of displaying their piety and show that they can also please Allah, via different means. Many anthropological researchers have tried to understand the politics of piety within Islam and have proven that women experience unequal treatment with reference to access to religious beliefs and practices. This has led them to determine their own ways of reaching out to the

supernatural<sup>19</sup>. Gujjar and Bakarwal women tend to be associated with popular beliefs and in most cases they seem to have lesser understanding of religious texts which are often seen as male domain. It is true that even among men there are many who are illiterate and do not know many things. They have the access to learning from the *masjid* and other religious gatherings where the text is interpreted for them. Women on the other hand are left out in the entire exercise, except for few of them whose parents or husbands encourage them to learn or teach them the religious texts. Prohibition of going to the *masjid* or attending any religious gatherings alongside men makes a huge difference in their outlook towards life. This way they miss out on the philosophical and theological aspects of the religion and in turn use their own way of interpreting and worshipping and seeking God. Some of the observations in the community are explained. Many pregnant Gujjar women tie black threads on their ankle, believing that their child will be saved from *bhoot pret* (evil spirits), and will be born healthy.

### **Conclusion**

The worldview of Muslims revolves around ‘good’ and ‘evil’, submission to God and abiding to the teachings of Qur’an and the Hadith about the judgment day, paradise and hell. Hadith remains a practical enterprise about the life of the Prophet, his established tradition, which is a perfect model and requirement for all Muslims to

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<sup>19</sup> Boddy in her classic work on the Arabic speaking region of Sudan, studied the women’s *zār* cult –a widely practiced healing cult that uses Islamic idioms and spirit mediums and whose membership is largely female. She proposes how in a society where the “official ideology” of Islam is dominated and controlled by men, the *zār* practice might be understood as a space of subordinate discourse- as “a medium for the cultivation of women’s consciousness.” (1989: 34-5).

follow. When it comes to other aspects of practices within Islam, things are not uniform and dissensions emerge. One level there is unity among them as Muslims but deep down we find disparity in the way they look at each other in terms of their faith and practice. In actual practice and faith there is more in common than conflict but one may regard the other as ‘not a good Muslim’ for any variety of reasons especially during some conflict which maybe over some personal vendetta.

Gujjars who are pastoral nomads try to maintain a harmonious Islamic life within their nomadic lifestyle. Pastoral nomadism also contributes in giving a different perspective about how Islam is practiced in the light of all the difficulties and inconveniences. Because of their different understandings and interpretations of the scriptures they feel that they are pleasing God despite hardships of nomadism. In fact the religion that they practice has been adapted to their nomadic life. Of course when we study different communities practicing Islam there seem to be enormous variety in the way people express their piety<sup>20</sup>. At least when compared to settled communities who have more time for all the religious obligations and attending religious spaces like *masjid* or observing fast or ritual cleansing, nomadic lifestyle constrains such ideal treatment of religion and thus causes rift among the adherents of Islam. It is evident that despite ethnic differences as Muslims they have adhered to monistic theology, belief in one sovereign God, Allah, to whom all the Muslims be it

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<sup>20</sup> Today it is problematic to speak of a monolithic South Asian Islam because Islam has evolved over time and space, “on a scale ranging from pure to hybrid.” (Malik 2012:1). In other words, there is so much diversity and distinction in the formations of religious communities and “one has to agree that Muslims and non-Muslims can no longer hide behind the image of ideal Islam.”(*ibid*: 8). Also see Metcalf (2009) and Robinson (2000).

the Kashmiris or the Gujjars bow down to. However, the way each of them sees themselves in relation to their connection with the divine being is 'competitive'. The psychological dimension coupled with social and economic inequality is the way through which the evaluation has taken place as a good or bad Muslim. Such kind of variations within Islam occurs because of multiple socio-cultural and religious factors which bring about variety of responses among the people professing the faith across the world. Though the concept of solidarity to all human beings as children of God is known and preached dissent towards people of other faith and also within the brotherhood of believers is unavoidably present. Kashmiri Muslims consider the ways of the Muslim Gujjars to be 'diluted' and a little bit away from the normative Islam. The reason being their constant migration practices and interaction with others seem to have more influence of non-Islamic traditions.

We can see the entire situation taking the Gujjars as agents, who are nomadic, settled and Muslims, who function in relation to other agents-the Kashmiris, the Hindus or Sikhs in the religious field of forces. Religious field is the field of forces as any other field acting upon individuals and groups under the historical experiences and power relations. The forces of religious interpretations of the specialists who enforce the dogma and rules and the affluent who subscribe to those views intersect on the religious views of the common believers and the marginal. The latter based on certain internalized values exhibit dispositions, but the individual as conscious being reflects on the religious impositions and behaves accordingly. At another level though religion is integrative it also provides room for division, alternative views when certain dogmas or interpretations are questioned. The practice of religion

examines religious behaviour in a deeper way taking account of possibilities and causative factors for dissent and compliance. The Gujjars, as agents act to cater to the needs of their religion by doing all the Islamic rites and rituals, at the same time, we need to remember that they are also human beings, who in crisis do not mind taking help from another human being irrespective to any religious affiliation.

## Chapter 7

### Summary and Conclusion

Religion, that has been ever challenging and intriguing for anthropological engagement, is chosen for the present research. The religion of the pastoral nomadic Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir is considered interesting for the fact that Gujjars embraced Islam few centuries ago while their counter parts in other states continue as Hindu. With this background of the Gujjars, the study began with the following questions. How do Gujjars practice Islam being themselves nomadic pastorals? How do the Gujjars maintain their identity as ethnic group as well as adherents of Islamic faith, as they regularly interact with other Hindu neighbours and local Muslims? To what extent do their original beliefs of Hindu religion remain as sediments and influence their practice of Islam? The study follows the trend of a shift in social anthropological study of religion from preliterate societies to the religions of contemporary advanced literate societies. The study has attempted to fill the gap in anthropological study of religion among the nomadic tribes in India. It also intends to contribute to the anthropological knowledge of Islam in India in general and Muslim tribes in particular.

Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir are broadly classified into three categories: Muquami or Desi Gujjars (sedentary agriculturalist), the Banihara or Dodhi Gujjars (buffalo rearer) and the Bakarwals (shepherds). Most scholars like to use the term Gujjars as inclusive category of all these groups, since there are a number of social and cultural

similarities, and a history of immigration. They are all Gujjar as compared to Kashmiris, Dogras, or other Indian populations and social categories. Among them who still undertake their seasonal migration along with their cattle are known as Khanabadosh. The physical movements of the pastoral nomads are crucial; not only for their livelihood but also that they shape the socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of their individual and collective identity. The pastoral Gujjars' relation to the *pahar*, *rasto*, *radari*, the *kafila* or the *dera*, give them a sense of identity, a tradition which is theirs and makes them unique. In the recent years, the seasonal migrants are facing many challenges, due to the rise in population and non-availability of pasture lands, besides the restrictions imposed due to border security and presence of military on both Indian and Pakistan sides. In addition to these, sedentarization of Gujjars is another aspect which is slowly on the rise.

The fieldwork among the Gujjars was carried out at different places during 2009-2011 in Jammu and Kashmir, since there are different groups of Gujjars and all do not stay in one area. This had its own advantage and disadvantages. The advantage is that I could observe and compare the Dodhi Gujjars, the Desi Gujjars and the Bakarwals in their own settings. The disadvantage is that long term stay in one place and doing an in-depth study was not possible. This limitation has been compounded by fact that the researcher being a woman.

There are several speculations about the origin of the Gujjars, but it has been agreed upon by scholars that they are immigrants to Jammu and Kashmir few centuries ago. It has also been speculated that perhaps Gujjars were single ethnic group and that in course of time segmented into three groups with their occupational specialization and

change to sedentary from nomadic life. At present some continue to practice semi-nomadic life which may eventually lead to settled life and some are permanently settled for various reasons, and among them the government initiative appears to be very dominant. These three groups speak variants of Gujuri, an Indo-European family of languages under the Indo-Aryan sub-family. This is closely related to Mewati, a Rajasthani language. Most of them in fact are multi-lingual as they speak Urdu and Hindi and some can speak even Kashmiri. Since 1991 they are listed under the Scheduled Tribes. They are differentiated not only on the basis of livelihood patterns but also social organization each one being referred as *zat*. Each of these *zat* or the ethnic group has been divided into *gotras* and the names of these *gotras* are same as that of Hindu Gujjars who live in different parts of North India. The *gotra* is divided into different *biradaris*. The *biradari* in their movement split into smaller groups called *kafilas* and each of which contain a few extended families called *deras*. Each of the *kafilas* has specific migratory routs to follow in their migrations over winters and summers. Each *gotra* has a chief called *mukkadam* and council of elders called *jirga* at the level of *biradari* to look after the affairs of *zat* members. While the Bakarwals usually marry cross-cousins as well as mother's sister's daughter avoiding father's brother's daughter, the other Gujjars marry all types of cousins i.e. children of the siblings of the parents.

Gujjars have constructed their world into two types: One of humans and the other of Allah. The latter has two components: paradise and hell. While the former is temporal, the latter is eternal. The world of Allah is invisible whereas the world of humans is visible. In the human world there are things created by God - humans,

animals and plants, and in the world of Allah there are angels and other spirits. These two worlds are connected and interact with each other through various sacred structures, spaces and religious specialists. Some of these sacred structures are: *masjid*, *dargah* and to some extent also the *qabar* (ancestral graves). The sphere of sacred spaces extends to areas outside these structures, which could be residential houses, surroundings, spaces created temporarily during migrations etc. The Gujjars believe in several spirits, many of those who still migrate to higher altitudes in the mountains staying temporarily near the jungles and streams, narrate stories of their experiences to those settled in the towns. The spirit world consists of these types - *jinns*, *bhoot*, *jogin*, *jurreal*, *pari* and *masan*. Broadly spoken of as *tasruf*, these kinds of spirits or quasi-spirit beings occasionally torment, oppress or even possess certain people. Within all the sacred structures, the role of the sacred specialists is significant as they are the media through which the basic teachings of Islam are imparted to the people. The operation of various life cycle rituals in their lives both collectively as well as the individual effort to keep up with the ideals of ideals of Qu'ran Islam , helps them to become devout Muslims. The interplay of their nomadic lifestyle and faith is also exhibited, when they view the spaces and the routes and mountains they migrate to seasonally as opportunities to draw closer to Allah.

The anthropological study of religion has been a matter of great debate especially when it comes to doing 'anthropology of Islam'. It became acute when Clifford Geertz came up with his pioneering work of interpretive anthropology, to understand Muslim societies in particular context. His critiques undermine his work, alleging

that he did not emphasize on understanding of religious texts and traditional literature, but rather focused on the life and beliefs of people who call themselves Muslims. The contemporary debate in anthropology of Islam is whether we should look at the people's lived realities or is there the need to focus on the textual interpretation of Islam, to understand Muslims better?

However, contribution on religion by anthropologists, especially from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, starting from pioneering works of Geertz cannot be undermined. We have to admit that Muslims have been influenced by local traditions, bringing out local flavor in their practice, as observed by anthropologists. This is also evident from the categories anthropologists come up with-like 'Indonesian Islam', 'Moroccan Islam', 'African-American Islam', and 'Indian Islam' and so on. I would also not hesitate to coin a new term here-'Gujjar Islam', through my work among them Gujjars who are Muslims. This way we may have as many Islams as many societies that we have. However, such sorting out of Muslims is also required because Muslims in different places show varied form of practices. This is because they are being influenced by local social and cultural milieu they are in, despite them following the practices of the Great religion-the five basic tenets and other associate rites. The challenge with anthropology of Islam is however with how to authentically and objectively represent Muslims through interactions in their daily lives. These interactions are dependent on religious tenets and interpretations, and every day mundane activities that correspond with religion or deviations. To do this, anthropologists have commonly tried to use the 'ideal' and 'lived' concepts in their research on Muslims and also the idea that there is a 'global'/ Great tradition as well

as 'local'/ little tradition aspects that need to be considered while studying the religion of any community including Muslims as well.

Even among the Gujjars, we find them commenting and interpreting on what Islam teaches them to do - keeping the five basic tenets, living a pious life, aiming at good deeds, keeping oneself clean physically and abstaining from unclean thoughts, words and acts. All these can be seen in the domain of the 'Ideal' form of Islam, which however is quite different from the way people actually 'live out' their daily lives, whose actions reflects beyond the domain of the textual Islam and proposing alternatives to suit their idea of piety, thereby creating dissent among the adherents, and the different Gujjar sub-groups. This includes creating ideas about what pleases Allah, alternate ways to reach Allah via the medium of *pir* and *dargah*, reverence to ancestors by praying in their graves, women showing alternate piety, growing inter faith interactions and accommodation and so on.

Differentiating 'Ideal' and 'lived' aspects of religion is not also very easy, as both aspects seem to merge together, often overlapping and copying from each other. In attempting to understand these connections, Geertz's (1973) concepts of model 'of' and model 'for' reality are to examine the interplay of the ideal and lived aspects of Islam. The concepts are elucidated in Chapter 4 and chapter 5. In the *model of* and *model for* aspects of reality, the individuals and groups manipulate symbolic and non-symbolic structures to construct the world as it exists and the ideal world. The significant symbolic structures are ideas about *Allah*, *Jannat*, *Jahanum* and also includes physical objects like *dargah*, rites, *namaz* etc. All the mundane every day experiences in family, community, political and economic relationships constitute

dominant non-symbolic structures which are manipulated by the symbolic structure and vice versa. These create permanent moods and motivations in people and produce appropriate behaviour and psychological experiences. The way people manipulate or try to live their everyday lives, in connection with the larger symbol structures, sometimes adhering to practices not sanctioned by the ideal religion, is what constitutes the '*model of*' aspect of religion.

*Model for* refers to a model under which physical relationships are organized. In the case of Gujjars their physical relationships in terms of their religious lives are centered on the basic teachings of Islam spread via several religious specialists and sacred texts. The analysis however does not stop there are to see the interactions of 'symbols structure' and the 'non-symbolic systems', the role of the agents interacting in the field of forces is important to note. In the case of Gujjars, we find their world structured around different field of forces, like being nomads, semi-nomads, sedentary in terms of their lifestyle; Sunni Muslims; buffalo herder (Dodhi) or sheep and goat rearer (Bakarwal) or sedentary agriculturalist (Desi) in terms of their economic activity. Another is 'field of humans': individual or agent occupies different positions as man, woman, child, mother, father, daughter, son, husband, wife, and so on. There is also the 'field of religion': worshipper of *Allah*, follower of *Pir*; as religious specialists-*Moulvi* or *Pir*, a *Hajji*<sup>1</sup> and so on. All the agents have different dispositions, a way of being or a person's inherent qualities of mind and character, and the agents are likely to act accordingly. So in the case of a Gujjar man or woman, they occupy specific position in the family, or community. The role of the

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<sup>1</sup> someone who has completed the religious pilgrimage to Mecca.

man as the head of the household is highly esteemed among them; he makes most of the decisions regarding family, economic activities and other political aspects pertaining to the community at large. A man as an agent is supposed to have dispositions of a decision maker, efficient leader, guide and protector of the family and cattle etc. A woman, as an agent, also occupies certain position within the field where she has her dispositions; in the family she is a care giver and nurturer, humble and submissive and faithful in her roles and responsibilities towards the husband and children.

According to Bourdieu, the positions the agents occupy in the field are determined by a number of things, firstly, there is the *habitus*, “a structuring which organizes practices and the perception of practices” for all agents. Bourdieu says every individual’s “*personal history, preferences and dispositions, placed in the context of the surrounding social reality*” (1971:82-83) form structures that to a certain extent predetermine that individual’s potential courses of action. The working of the *habitus*, among the Gujjars has been examined in the way different agents- man, woman, mother, father, husband, wife behave in their given circumstance, as pious adherents of Islam, or as casual believer, as faithful follower, obedient and disobedient.

In the case of man, we find that the reason he behaves or acts in a certain way is the result of personal history, preference and dispositions, placed in the context of the surrounding reality. In other words, men enjoy superior status than women as a result of the patriarchal tradition, and also the religious teachings with regard to men in terms of his closer association with Allah, because Adam came and then Eve. Also

the ideas of men being pure and women impure in terms of their biological attributes aid in constructing their dispositions, which eventually shapes the *habitus*.

The same analogy can be made for women as well. A woman also sees her identity as a Muslim and daughter of Eve. They believe in the five tenets of Islam: *Shahada*, *Namaz*, *Roza*, *Zakat* and *Hajj*, which they try to follow in their everyday lives. But they live in a pious disposition which may be different from that of men under various socio-cultural influences, to satisfy them. Women tend to create an alternate sort of piety like praying to *pirs*, or in some rare cases, revering certain sacred spaces, believing in overcoming the powers of *jinns* and other spirits more than men. Thus, all these factors make up the *habitus* that determines the position of men or women and produce certain dispositions in the cultural context of the Gujjar society.

Their history is quite intriguing too as there are different theories about their origin and migration, which seem to have contributed in the way Islam is practiced by them. We cannot deny the fact that their mobile tradition and interactions with outsiders at one level have made them a kind of excluded community. Also, being a nomadic community, the tradition of physical movement gives them immense scope to find a variety of alternate practices as well. Islam for the nomadic pastoral communities has a different outlook. Islam for them is about God who is known to be the creator of all things all, the guardian of everything and who has the keys to the heaven and the earth<sup>2</sup>. The idea of a sovereign God is quite appealing to nomads whose basic need is survival and the strategy for it is very complicated having no

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<sup>2</sup> See Khan and Al Hilali (1999) where the characteristics of Allah are discussed in the following verses of the Qu'ran 39:62-63, Qu'ran (59:22-24), Qu'ran (2:255).

fixed property or wealth. For instance, if the cattle die it is a loss of thousands of rupees for them or if there is no good fodder, then life becomes harder. For them, their cattle is everything and if they are affected the well being of the entire *dera* or *kafila* gets affected too. Here then, thinking of a powerful God who provides, protects and guides them in their journeys are part of their worldview which ultimately shapes the ethos and vice versa. The nomadic life leads to encountering various spirits haunting valleys, hills and with water sources. It also gives little chance to communal prayers in the mosques and at specific times.

The sedentary lifestyle has again a different outlook with regard to Islam. As one acquires a settled life there seem to be a tendency of acquiring more textual perspective of religion. For instance mosques represents the fixed structures of Islam, where there is gathering of people wearing clean clothes, availability of clean water and surroundings and attending prayers at specific timings at one particular place. This is generally a scene fit for settled communities and people tend to emphasis more on learning the textual aspects of Islam. On the other hand nomadic lifestyle revolves around taking care of buffaloes, sheep and goats, horses and dogs, often in dirty clothes and spending time often in grimy locations where reading of the Qu'ran is the least of the activity one would like to do. Their lives revolve around movements and movement is beyond structures and settled life. Also most of them are illiterate and so they are more into listening than reading the religious text.

Khanabadosh Gujjars can be called as travelling people with a travelling faith, where they are fully preoccupied with the concept of guidance. They consider Allah as the provider, sustainer, and as Islam teaches them Allah as merciful they choose to seek

His guidance and protection. Also, popular stories from the Qu'ran like the lives prophets *Ibrahim* (Abraham) and *Ishmail* (Ishmael), Yakub (Jacob) appeal to them more as they were also people who reared cattle and lived a nomadic life that parallels their own life. However, they also try to use their own means to reach out to Allah, sometimes much to the dissatisfaction of many Muslims who do not adhere to their practice. One thing in such lifestyle which is popular among many of the Khanabadosh Gujjars is the visit of *dargahs* of saints. Just visiting a *dargah* gives them a sense of piety towards Allah and also an opportunity to get their needs fulfilled in short time and also without having to get their normal routine disturbed, as on the way during their seasonal migration. They do not have to be time bound as in the case of a structured system of settled communities. Also, they believe that all their sins and shortcomings will be forgiven, if they go and petition to the *pir*, who is Allah's friend.

Today we find most of the Khanabadosh Gujjars caught in between, where the idea of 'settled' and 'being on the move' and there are clashes in their worldview. Any religion based on the textual tradition mostly thrives on settled population and for the Khanabadosh Gujjars the situations become difficult. Their rich tradition of nomadic life, which strengthens them as a community slowly, starts to become weak when they start acquiring a sedentary lifestyle. In addition their faith also encounters issues of contention, as now they no longer can give way to a flexible lifestyle and get in tune with the structured system even when it comes to practicing Islam. In addition there is a kind of insecurity with regard to people of other faiths, as they now interact with them more.

Bourdieu (1977) focuses on is *doxa* which is the second structuring principle in theory of field. According to him, *doxa* is

“the universe of tacit presuppositions that organize action within the field.”  
(*ibid*:164)

The *doxa* in other words, refers to the rules of the game/practice in the field for the agents. Like *habitus*, these rules have a limiting influence on the potential courses of action for the agents in the field. Agents in the same field will tend to share a set a rules, a common *doxa*, in so far as they agree that the particular ritual or practice is worth doing. In case of the Gujjars, there are rules, both social and religious, which each member will have to keep in mind and live accordingly. So when it comes to family obligations as the husband or wife, the *doxa* is that they are expected to fulfill their roles in terms of love, respect, and care for one another. The provider and protector role is for the husband, while the care giving and nurturing roles are for the women. A pastoral nomad prime occupation and concern is taking care of the cattle, and the seasonal migration. Other things are not so important even when it comes to aspects of religious practice, it is kept secondary and much flexibility is introduced. On the other hand, as woman, the general notion of good woman or girl is to marry at the right time and obey the parents and husband and know how to take care of the household, cattle and herself. Performing religious duties takes the secondary stage, where she is also expected to obey and observe the rituals. They are seen as polluting agents and also not allowed in the *masjid* and other activities of the community.

Men on the other hand have also been shaped by various subjectivities, though on one hand a man can be a religious person like a *moulvi*, a *hajji*, a *pir*, a father, a son

or a brother and so on, all these have their own *habitus*, as there are varied opinions amongst them. Some see the *dargah* reverence as *gunah*, while for some it is a *sunnat*. For some their daughters should read the Qu'ran, while for some other they should know how to do household chores first, while for some woman should rather obey men and silently obey what Islam says. For others girls should be allowed to go to school, while for some others schooling is not very important for girls especially as it exposes her to the outside world, which is bad. In this conceptualization the agent is a reflecting, envisioning, imagining, expressing and constructing the reality of world in symbolic mode.

However, in Bourdieu's version of the field, agents do not always agree on the *doxa* or the rules of the game. According to him, agents occupy positions aimed at either conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces in a field. Agents who take positions aimed at transforming the power relations would change the rules of the game for their own benefit. Examining the concept of *doxa* among the Gujjars brings out questions about the various expressions of faith like-How should a good Muslim behave? How one can reach out to Allah better - man or woman, whom should be approached for connecting with Allah and so on. The agents in the process of getting answers to such questions may resort to various methods. In this aspect there are often disagreements resulting in conflict between various agents, man, woman, a Dodhi Gujjar, a Bakarwal or a Desi Gujjar, follower of *pir*, non-adherent of *dargah* piety etc. Chapter six explains about this aspect in detail.

For instance, there is a common practice among poor Dodhi Gujjars and Bakarwals to visit the Ajmer Sharif *dargah* give times to substitute with the pilgrimage to

Mecca. This concept is criticized by many Gujjars and they look down upon such practice. Also, when it comes to faith and authority among the Gujjars, it is always dominated by men. So, when women assert having knowledge of the divine, or the supernatural, she is ridiculed or looked down upon. Also, other aspects that woman or girls like to do, especially singing, putting make-up, wanting to get married to person they like, are greatly frowned upon by the male members of the family, their fathers, brothers and uncles. Even when it comes to decision for family planning between husband and wife, the man is in control of the decision generally. Many women bear the decision silently but there are also many who rebel against authority. Desi Gujjar show reverence for ant hill and snake hole found near their settlement, which generally men or religious men do not approve (See Plate no. 23). We also find many Bakarwals and Dodhi Gujjars inclined towards *pir* reverence, while many of them, especially the Dodhi Gujjars who consider themselves as Wahabbi strictly disapproves of such practice, deeming it as un-Islamic. Those who revere *pirs* and also visit *dargahs* justify that *pir* is the medium to reach to Allah as he is a 'friend of Allah'. While those against the practice say that people are not wholly acknowledging the authority of Allah which an ideal Muslim should be striving for.

Most of the Gujjars assume that people have developed slack attitude towards Allah and religious duties and their faith is being threatened by various sources. They attribute this to the growing influence of media, mobile phones, and even television. These have hampered their relationship with God and the community traditions. Young men and women are believed to have become careless and derelicts about religious practices, lazy and not accountable people, unlike the older generation who

are religious, hardworking and accountable. Today suspicion and jealousies lurk the minds of people that has come as a result with the growing influence of outside elements. This is breeding hatred and quarrels within their community. Despite the fact that Gujjars that includes Dodhi, Desi and Bakarwal, are all Muslims and claiming themselves to be brothers in Allah's sight being *musalman*, there prevails a space for aversion towards each other in terms of their practices. There is always the claim of who is a better Muslim evaluating the behavior of the other, and the outlook towards each other's practice to be superior or inferior is the present scenario which is clearly seen.

Bourdieu highlights in this struggle, players will use their power/*capital*, as he calls it, to impose the rules that favour them the most. This holds true among the Gujjars too, with regard to issues of power or capital, people who have more resources are more powerful than the rest. For instance, the *hajji*, who has performed the Hajj, gets more respect than a *moulvi* and is often equated with a *pir*. Also, many of the rich Gujjars, impose their views on the rest and hold dominant positions in terms of decision making in the community. It is important to note that woman, whose husband is influential like the *pir*, gets more respect and the act of piety she performs gets appreciation, than woman whose husband has no social standing despite her being well versed with the religious knowledge. Among the Bakarwal, the tradition of reverence towards *pir* is mainly due to the influence of few rich Bakarwals who want to retain that tradition of their forefathers, by organizing *Urs* (celebrating the death and birth of the *pirs*) for those who are related to them. Even though there is

disagreement among them regarding reverence to shrines and *pirs*, many continue to follow the tradition.

Another important aspect to be considered is that religion also breeds hierarchization of authority, which is seen also among the Gujjars, where there is a tendency to label who is who in the 'ladder of Islamic authority'. The concern is with who has the better access to Allah or through whom the maximum benefit can be extracted. We find the *pirs* have some sort of spiritual authority over the lives of common muslim Gujjars. Though *moulvis* and other religious scholars too are popular when it comes to elements of their struggles with regard to something supernatural/ or encounter with the supernatural, they mostly prefer the meeting with the *pir*. A *moulvi* would claim that he is only having authority in terms of the Qu'ranic knowledge, and that the *pir* have the authority over the spiritual aspects. The *pir's* follower *murid* also tries to exercise certain authority in the way they direct people or advice them.

It is evident that despite ethnic differences as Muslims they have adhered to monotheistic faith, belief in Allah, to whom all the Muslims be they Kashmiris or Gujjars bow down to. The way each of them see themselves in relation to their connection with the divine being is 'competitive' and uneven. It is possible that the psychological dimension coupled with social and economic inequality is the way through which the evaluation has taken place as good or bad Muslim. Such kind of variations within Islam can be because of multiple socio-cultural and religious factors which bring about a variety of responses among the people professing the same faith. Though the concept of solidarity to all human beings as children of God is known and preached but dissent towards people of other faith and also within the

brotherhood of believers is unavoidably present. Kashmiri Muslims consider the ways of the Muslim Gujjars to be 'diluted' and a little bit away from the normative Islam. The reason being their constant migration practices and interaction with others seem to have more influence of non-Islamic traditions.

We can see the entire situation taking the Gujjars as agents, who are nomadic, settled and Muslims, who function in relation to other agents - the Kashmiris, the Hindus or Sikhs in the religious field of forces. Religious field is the field of forces as any other field acting upon individuals and groups under the historical experiences and power relations. The forces of religious interpretations of the specialists who enforce the dogma and rules and the affluent who subscribe to those views intersect on the religious views of the common believers and the marginal. The latter based on certain internalized values exhibit dispositions, but the individual as conscious being do reflect on the religious impositions and behave accordingly. At another level though religion is integrative it also provides room for division, alternative views when certain dogmas or interpretations are questioned. The practice of religion examines religious behaviour in a deeper way taking account of possibilities and causative factors for dissent and compliance. The Gujjars, as agents act to cater to the needs of their religion by doing all the Islamic rites and rituals, at the same time, we need to remember that they are also human beings, who in crisis do not mind taking help from another human being irrespective to any religious affiliation.

When it comes to the debate on how anthropologists can authentically study Muslim societies, the textual aspects as well as the contextual aspects need to be focused. However unlike suggestions by critics to anthropologists of engaging more with

Islamic texts, the present study suggests that what anthropologists ought to focus is to examine the way Muslims talk of the Islamic texts and traditions, as they understand it. From this we get a perspective of what Ideal Islam is for them. Secondly, we can examine their everyday lives keeping in mind the background of how they have defined how Muslims should be. This will reveal how they actually live as Muslims. Both their textual understandings as well as lived realities need to be studied to be able to objectively represent Muslims. The important issue to be addressed is why there is a gap between the ideal and lived, and how to explain the vacuum.

Studying the religion of the Gujjars has opened the door for re-examining how studies in Muslim communities can be studied. Studying religion among Muslims in Indonesia and Morocco (Geertz 1968), in Egypt (Saba Mahmood 2005) and in Pakistan (Marsden 2005), we find the research has shifted from the role of religion in society to the role that individuals play in shaping the religion. Geertz comes to the conclusion that religion concerns with social, cultural, and psychological phenomenon (1968: viii). He also emphasizes the fact that studying religion is not to just describe ideas, acts and institutions, but to describe in what way particular set of ideas, act and institutions sustain, fail to sustain or even inhabit religious faith (1968:2). It is to find the extent in which religion affects individuals and how individuals shape the religion. Mahmood's (2005) study on the women's piety movement in Egypt reveals the importance given to agency, how as human beings, all have the innate desire of freedom and in order to fulfill it, the human agency, through acts challenges the social norms (*ibid*:5). Marsden (2005) study points to

Chitrali society's experiences shared by ordinary individuals whose thought provoking comments on Islam and this has enriched his understanding of the Chitrali Muslims (*ibid:7*). His primary focus was not just to ask what Muslims think of the themselves, but to understand how as Muslims they engage emotionally and intellectually with the setting in which they are in (*ibid: 241*).

The controversy between 'anthropology of Islam' - 'lived out' and 'ideal' Islam, and 'Islamic anthropology' as pointed out earlier can find a solution when we consider the utility of the concepts of 'field theory' or 'practice' and 'subject' which has been employed in the present study. Individual as subject is the starting point of conceptualizing the culture of Gujjar, and for the present it is religion. The practice of religion in individual's own understanding in his/her experience as man, woman, and performing roles of different social statues, and again as Muslim in interaction with other religions, and also interacting with the physical and social worlds that form the basis. It gets extended to the interaction with others as a group with similar and different experiences and understanding of other groups during the course of which emerge different meanings out of contest, disagreement and agreement on the common concerns. The ideals and actual practices of the individuals and groups can be understood from this perspective as individuals are reflective beings as much as they are governed by the culture.

So 'structures' of ideal and lived concepts of Islam, there is a space, which human beings as thinking individuals occupy and act accordingly. I have tried to examine the underlying connection in terms of focusing at the actors as individual, define what Islam mean for them, and here the interpretation vary from one individual to

another. For some it is not so much important, for others it is a way of life, for many others it is a means of identity and security, for some it is a way to Allah, some others see it good for their soul and so on. Different people with different *habitus*, due to the fact that the subject internalizes the structures of the external world, operate differently. This idea of the subject which forms internalized structures forming *habitus*, is what I think best help us connect the two concepts of lived and ideal Islam, better. As when we understand the Gujjars, it is on the basis of how they as nomads, man and woman, with their set of dispositions, have created a *habitus* over time and history, leading to how they perceive themselves in the sea of Islam. In other words of Ortner, who focuses on subjectivity as understanding "...how people try to act on the world as they are acted upon..." (2005:38). In this way the Gujjars, as subjects, have fashioned their behavior towards Islam, as shaped by "a matrix of subjectivity- of culturally constituted, feelings, thoughts and meanings." (*ibid*: 38), which includes how they are to behave as nomads, woman and man and so on.

In general the faith of the common Gujjar seems to have been constructed and also constrained by the physical and social environment rather than deeper theological or philosophical Islam. It is a simple faith what is being taught without much questioning which of course is furnished with the concept of good and evil which holds the highest esteem. Their dual categorization of the world is commonly observed where we find that in almost every conversation there is differentiation and categorization. For instance like paradise and hell, good and evil, pure and impure, believers and non-believers, Gujjars and non-Gujjars, plains and mountains etc. Fear and superstition generally captures the attention of the Gujjars who live with it and

find solution to the problem by referring to different mediums. Also, understanding a nomadic group that faces the challenge of sedentarization in relation to their faith is important as settled life presents religious expressions different from that of nomadic lifestyle. Thus when we try to understand about Gujjar religion, we have to keep in mind the various socio-cultural milieu and also geographical considerations, as all these contribute to their ideas of faith and piety in their everyday lives.

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Plate no. 1: The Pir Panjal Range



Plate no. 2: Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars settlements in Sanasar valley

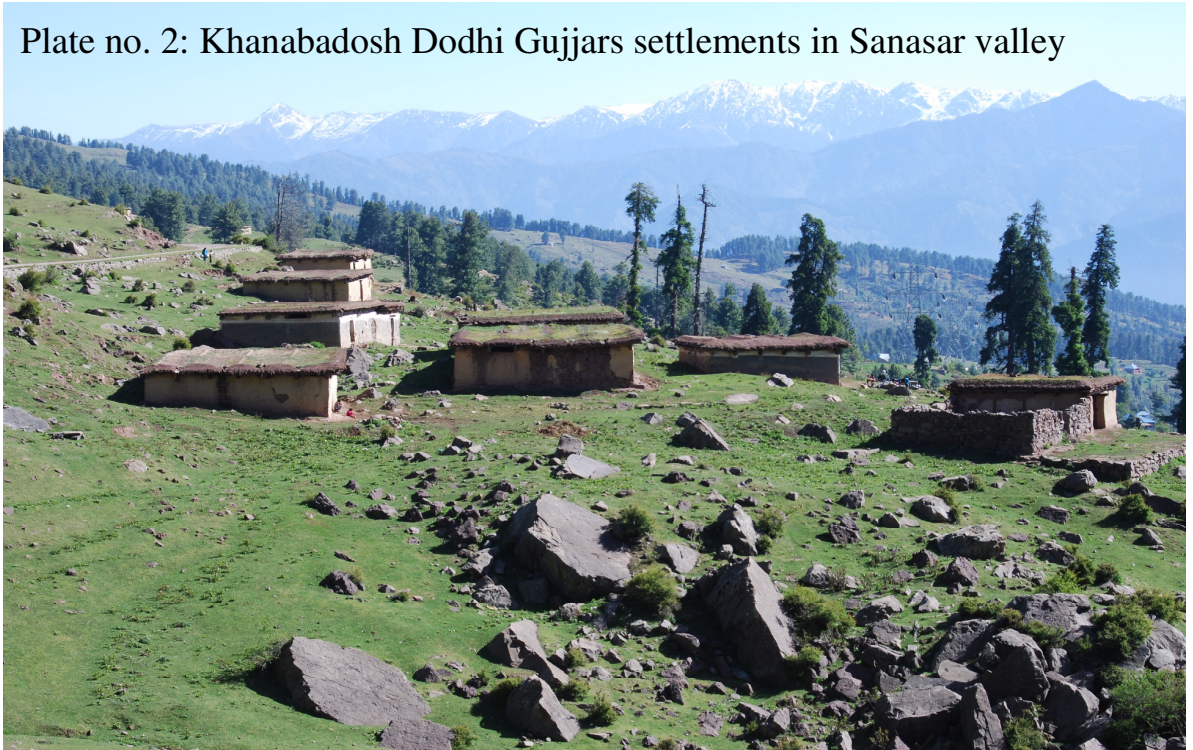


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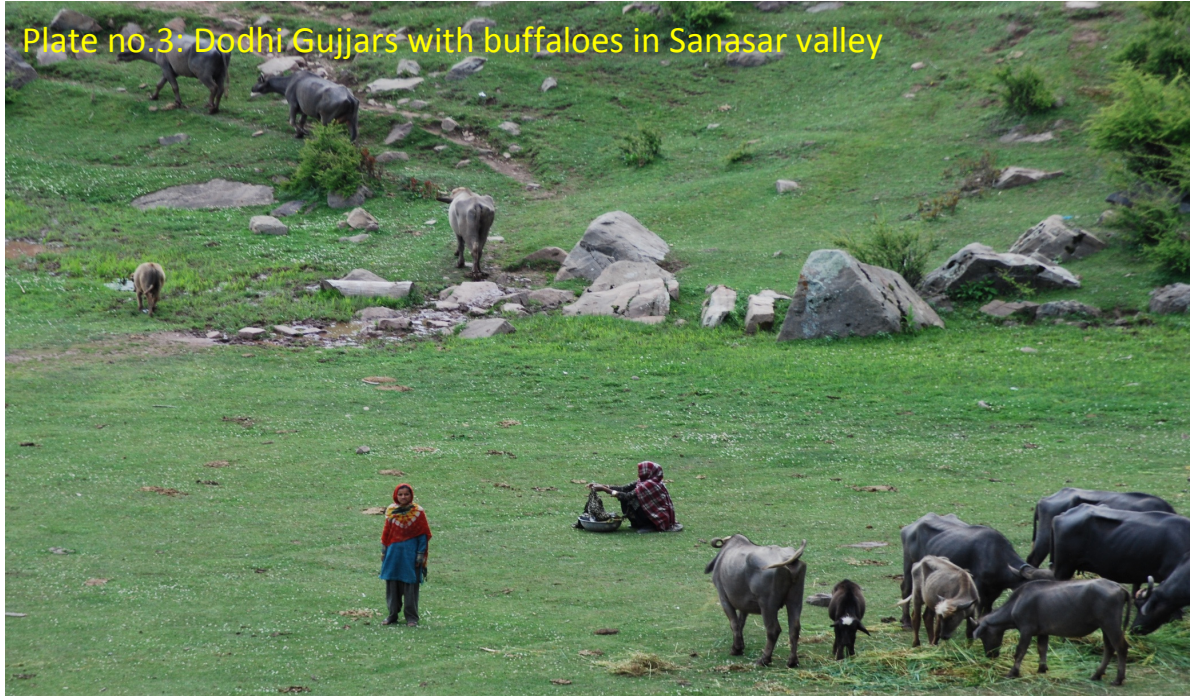


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Plate no.5: Dodhi Gujjar women in Rakh Baroti settlement



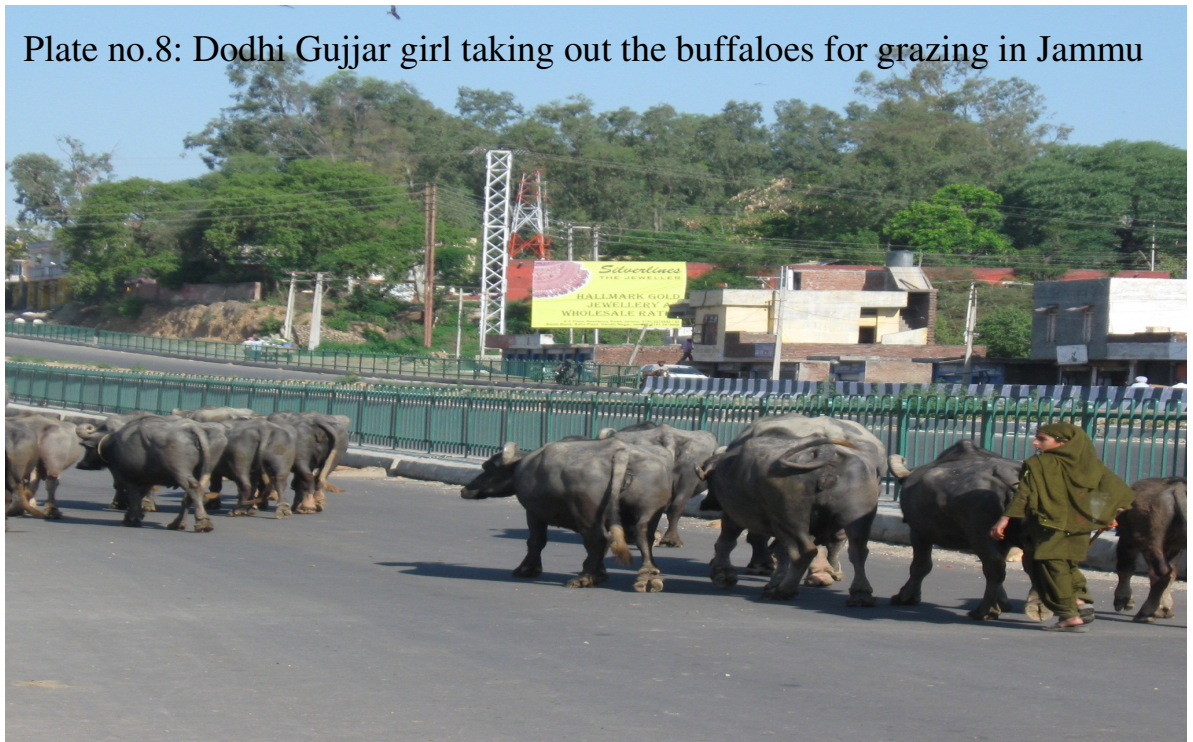
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Plate no.8: Dodhi Gujjar girl taking out the buffaloes for grazing in Jammu







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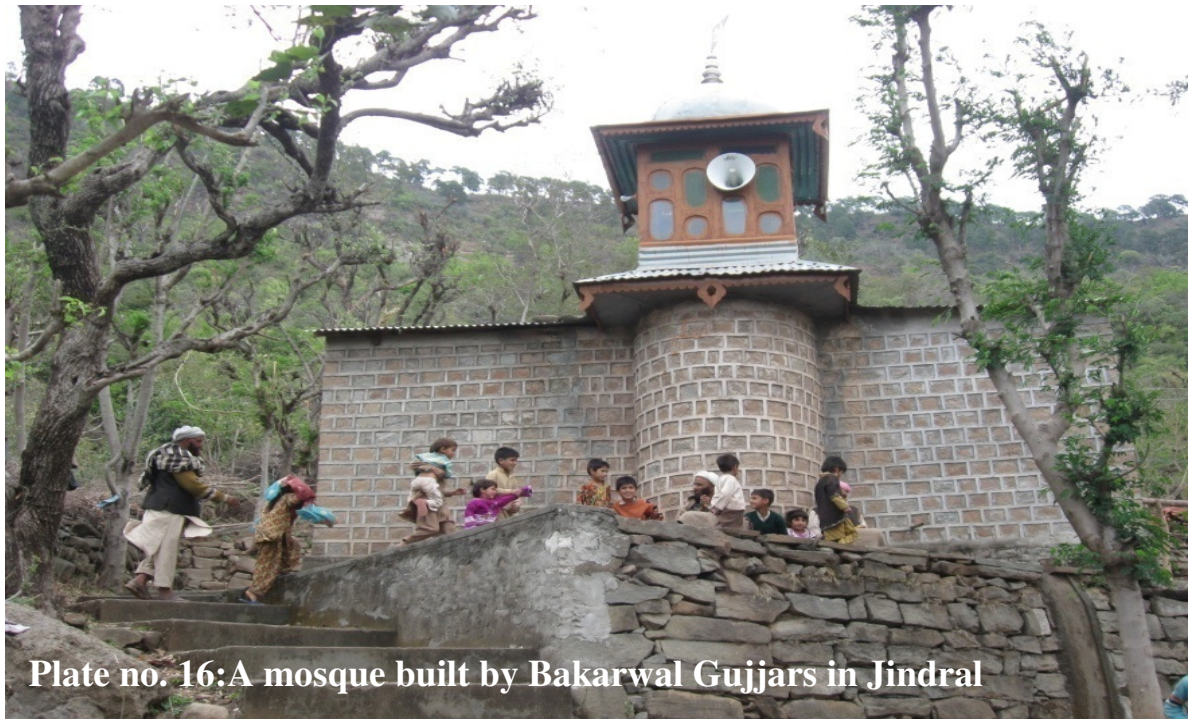
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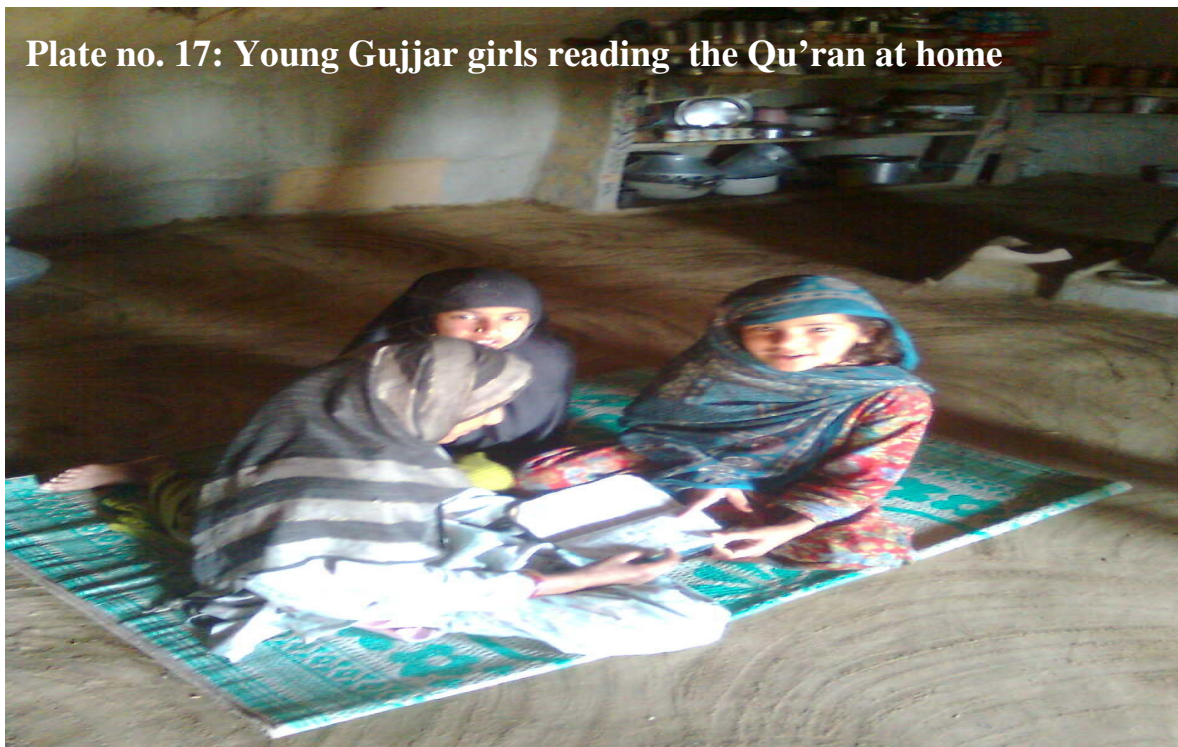


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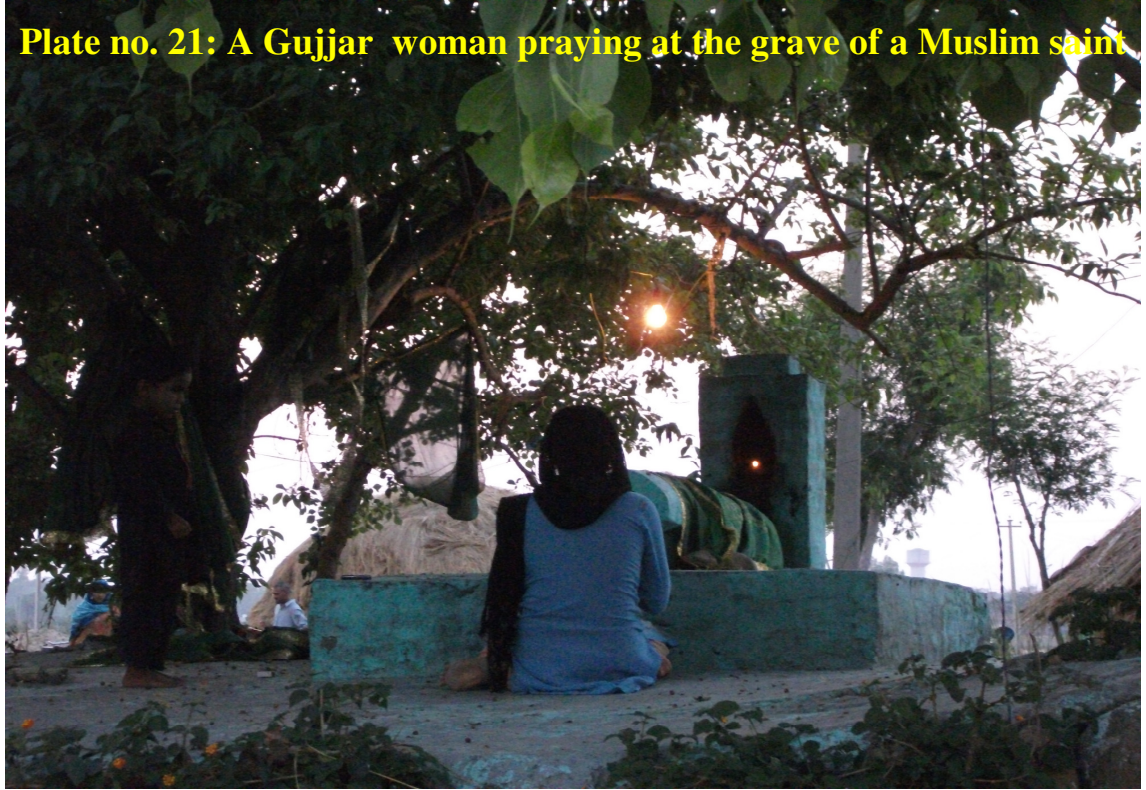
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**Plate no. 22: Ant hill and snake hole**





**Plate no.23: A Dodhi Gujjar girl getting treated by a Hindu woman**



**Plate no.24: Elderly Dodhi Gujjar women smoking *hookah***



Plate no. 25: Desi Gujjar women in a marriage function



Plate no.26: Dodhi Gujjar women offering *namaz* together

## GLOSSARY

**Adam:** First man and first prophet of Allah.

**Alim:** A scholar or learned person.

**Allah:** A divine name of God.

**Ayah:** A sign of Allah or a verse from the Qu'ran.

**Azan:** The Muslim call for prayer, recitation on the greatness and uniqueness of Allah and also His messenger, Prophet Muhammad.

**Dargah:** Shrine of a dead saint.

**Deen:** Religion.

**Dua:** Supplication to God.

**Durood sharif:** Invocation citing phrases to complement Prophet Muhammad.

**Eid-ul fitr:** Celebration marking the end of Ramzan.

**Eid-ul-zuha:** Festival commemorating the sacrifice by Prophet Abraham.

**Fatiha (Surah Fatiha):** The most important Surah of the Holy Qur'an and no Muslim prayer is complete without this.

**Fatwa:** Refers to a decision on how to conduct oneself, a ruling point of Islamic law.

**Hadith:** The sacred sayings of Muhammad, handed down by oral tradition and finally written down.

**Hajj:** Pilgrimage to Mecca. One of the five pillars of the Islamic faith.

**Hajji:** One who has completed pilgrimage to Mecca.

**Halal:** Something that is lawful and permissible to use/consume in Islam.

**Haram:** That which is unlawful in Islam. It is necessary to abstain from acts that are haram.

**Hawa:** First woman created by God.

**Hijrah:** Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.

**Jahanum:** Islamic concept of hell.

**Jannat:** Islamic concept of paradise.

**Jinn:** It is a type of creature or spirits, having human like character. They are mentioned in the Qu'ran.

**Jumah:** Congregational prayer held on Friday.

**Kaidah:** Rule or law.

**Kalimah:** Declaration of faith. There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

**Qur'an:** The inspired word of God given to Muhammad.

***Madrassa:*** Islamic schools.

***Masjid:*** Schools teaching Islamic theology and religious law, typically including a mosque.

***Mazhab:*** Religion.

***Mecca:*** Birthplace of Muhammad, and the holy city of Islam.

***Medina:*** Holy city named for Muhammad after he fled there in 622 A.D.

***Moulvi:*** Religious scholar.

***Muezzlin:*** Announcer for hour of prayer.

***Muhammad:*** Founder and Prophet of Islam.

***Murid:*** Devoted one, a follower of the pir.

***Musalman:*** Followers of Prophet Muhammad. It literally means one who submits to the will of Allah.

***Nabi:*** Refers to a prophet.

***Najais:*** Refers to something that is impure.

***Nikah:*** It is a pronouncement of marriage according to the Shari'ah.

***Pakh:*** Refers to something that is clean.

***Pir:*** a Sufi teacher or a spiritual leader.

***Qabar:*** Grave.

***Qiyamat:*** The day of resurrection.

***Qurbani:*** Sacrifice.

***Ramzan:*** The ninth and one of the most sacred month of the Muslim year. It is considered as a month of fasting.

***Roza:*** Fasting.

***Roohani:*** Spiritual.

***Namaz:*** Muslim daily prayer ritual. One of the five pillars of Islam.

***Shaitan:*** The enemy of God.

***Sawab:*** Reward.

***Shahada:*** Declaration.

***Shajada:*** Worship.

***Shia:*** A Muslim sect which insists that Muhammad's son-in-law 'Ali was Muhammad's rightful successor.

***Shifa:*** Restoration or a method of healing in Islamic tradition.

***Sufi:*** A Muslim mystic and/or ascetic.

***Sunnah:*** The Prophet's recorded words and actions.

***Sunnat:*** Recommendable or desirable acts by doing which a person can earn reward.

**Sunni:** Largest Muslim sect which acknowledges all of Muhammad's successors.

**Surah:** Chapters of the Qur'an.

**Tawbah:** repentance.

**Tawiz:** A locket containing the verses of the Quran.

**Wali:** A friend of Allah.

**Wasilah:** It is a means to approach Allah.

**Wazu:** Ritual washing before the commencement of prayer.

**Zakat:** The fourth pillar of Islam, which refers to is an obligatory charity given to the poor. It actually means to be pure.

**Ziyarat:** Visiting and/or reciting special salutations for the Prophet Muhammad and his household.

**Zulm:** Wrongdoing against someone.

Ph.D. Thesis

**AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF RELIGION AMONG THE GUJJARS OF  
JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

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**Synopsis**

The present study explores the importance of religion among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, who are an ethnic community leading a semi-nomadic pastoral life in the hill ranges of Himalayas. Even though they are sporadically mentioned in some of the available literature, many aspects about their religious life largely remain unexplored particularly through anthropological lens. Keeping in view of this, the research attempted to understand religion as experienced by them in their everyday lives. Being a semi-nomadic community, the tradition of physical movement gives them immense scope to find a variety of alternate practices as well. Their varied beliefs and practices often result in unity among the adherents as well as tensions within. They are seen to be people who are critical of their own practices and show signs of accommodation in terms of their view on other faiths.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Studying Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir has been considered important for the reasons of their semi-nomadic life despite some having settled down; conversion to Islam though their counterparts in other states continue as Hindu and the influence of modernity in their lives. They continue to maintain their ethnic identity in the midst of other ethnic groups like Gaddis, Dogras, Balti, Dards, Ladhakis and so on and also as Muslims differentiating themselves from Kashmiri

Muslims. They face certain challenges as semi-nomads and also with sedentary lifestyle in the practice of religion, engaging themselves in various theological debates and conflicting discourses and interpretations. In this context the present research attempts to study the religion of Gujjars in a complex situation.

### **Research Questions**

The questions raised in this research in the above context are, how do Gujjars practice Islam being semi-nomadic pastoralists? To what extent do their original beliefs of Hindu religion remain as sediments and influence their practice of Islam? Further, it is important to ask how the Gujjars maintain their identity as semi-nomads and sedentary life as well as adherents of Islamic faith, as they regularly interact with other Hindu neighbours and local Muslims.

### **Significance**

The study follows the trend of a shift in social anthropological study of religion from preliterate societies to the religions of contemporary advanced literate societies. It attempts to fill the gap in anthropological study of religion among the nomadic tribes in India. It also aims to contribute to the anthropological understanding of Islam in India in general and Muslim tribes in particular.

### **Review of Literature**

The review of literature is limited to the current debate on ‘Anthropology of Islam’ and ‘Islamic Anthropology’ but not the huge body of literature available on anthropological studies of religion accumulated over the years. A brief review of the studies pertaining to Indian Muslims and Gujjars is undertaken, and it shows that there is hardly any study that focuses exclusively on the religion of the Gujjars which is the subject matter of the present study.

## **Objectives of the Study**

**Objective 1:** To understand the identity and socio-cultural profile of the Gujjars

**Objective 2:** To study the worldview-beliefs, cosmology and myths of the Gujjars' religion

**Objective 3:** To find out the role of religious specialists and the concerns of the supernatural beings.

**Objective 4:** To understand the adherence to Islam, debates and dissents on the practice of Islam.

## **Theoretical Framework**

As there is no acceptable definition of religion, it is thought wise to use a definition that can guide as well as provide a methodology for collecting information and analysis<sup>1</sup> instead of having none. For this purpose, Geertz's (1973) definition of religion and his methodology has been considered relevant for the study which in fact acquired considerable popularity not only in anthropology but also outside the discipline. Also, keeping the recent trend in anthropological theory in perspective, the present study considers the theory of practice proposed by Bourdieu (1977, 1993, 2005) and the critical theory that attempts to revisit the anthropological understanding of culture and subject (Ortner 2005). This eclectic framework has been considered appropriate given the debate on 'Anthropology of Islam' and 'Islamic Anthropology' as a middle path for better representation of Muslim societies.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that the definition of religion given by Geertz has been criticized by many (See Asad (1983:238) and Morris (2006:10), I find it suitable for my research as it gives a direction for research.

## **Fieldwork and Data Collection**

The primary data for the study has been collected through an intensive anthropological fieldwork which was carried out among the Dodhi Gujjars, Desi Gujjars and Bakarwals during 2009-2011 in three spells. Since Gujjars are geographically distributed throughout Jammu and Kashmir, the data collection could not be confined to a particular location for a long duration and instead moved to different locations such as Rakh Baroti settlement, Gujjar Colony (Sunjuwan) in Jammu area, Krimchi in Udhampur, Laiter (Talwara) in Reasi, Sanasar (Patnitop) area in Doda and Nishat in Srinagar.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

The data collected and analysis has been presented in seven chapters including the Introduction. In this thesis, wherever the term 'Gujjar' is used it is inclusive of the Dodhi, Desi and Bakarwal and wherever there is need for specification, the terms Dodhi, Desi and Bakarwal are exclusively used.

The first chapter, **Introduction**, presents the statement of the problem of the research undertaken and review of literature. The reviews bring to the light the issues, debates and discussions on the anthropological studies of Islam. This is followed by the research questions, significance of the study and objectives set for the study.

The second chapter, **Research Methodology**, gives the details of the research methodology besides information on the study area profile, socio-demographic profile, data collection and challenges of fieldwork. Geertz's (1973) definition of religion and the concepts of 'model of' and 'model for' reality are considered relevant for the study. Along with this the theory of practice proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1993, 2005) and the critical theory that is

attempting to revisit anthropological understanding of culture and subject (Ortner 2005). The fieldwork among the Gujjars was carried out at different places during 2009-2011 in Jammu and Kashmir, since there are different groups of Gujjars and all do not stay in one area. This had its own advantage and disadvantages. The advantage is that I could observe and compare the Dodhi Gujjars, the Desi Gujjars and the Bakarwals in their own settings. The disadvantage is that long term stay in one place and doing an in-depth study was not possible. This limitation has been compounded by the researcher being a woman.

The third chapter, **The Outline of the Gujjar World**, focuses on the origin and migration of the Gujjars, identity and tradition, language, social status, economy and social organization in general. In addition to these, it highlights the intricacies within the ethnic group, in terms of similarities and differences, and the classification they make to identify as different ethnic groups within themselves. The history of Gujjars is quite intriguing too as there are different theories about their origin and migration. Due to their traditional nomadic life without permanent habitation it is difficult to trace their place of origin, and the debate still continues among scholars. Most scholars like to use the term Gujjars as inclusive of all these groups, the Bakarwal, the Dodhi and the Desi Gujjars. There are several social and cultural points of similarity and historical experiences that make them all “Gujjar” as compared to “Kashmiri”, “Dogra”, or other Indian populations. Among them who still undertake their seasonal migration along with their cattle are known as Khanabadosh. They cover distances of 200 to 300 kilometers in each trip between their summer and winter homes. In Jammu and Kashmir, they are mostly Sunni Muslims who share some common socio-cultural features with Hindu Gujjars of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Gujjars today distinguish themselves based various criteria like place of migration and economy. On the basis of their

place of migration, they classify as the Pahari Gujjars, the Laddia Gujjars, the Poonchi Gujjars, the Bhaderwahi Gujjars, and the Kashmiri Gujjars and so on. On the basis of their economic lifestyle as Muquami or Desi Gujjars (sedentary agriculturalist), the Banihara or Dodhi Gujjars (buffalo rearer) and the Bakarwal (shepherds). We also find that the physical movements of the pastoral nomads are crucial not only for their livelihood but also shape the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of their individual and collective identity. The pastoral Gujjars' relation to the *pahar* (mountains), *rasto* (routes), *radari* (movement), the *kafila* (caravan) or the *dera* (endogamous clan unit), give them a sense of identity, a tradition which is theirs and makes them unique. In the recent years, their seasonal migration is facing many challenges due to the rise in population. The availability of pasture lands have decreased and this poses a great threat to their occupation. In addition to these issues, sedentarization of Gujjars is another aspect which is slowly on the rise. Efforts are made by the state to settle them for their 'development' which has brought about many changes in their traditional livelihood practices.

The fourth chapter, **Being Sunni Musalman: the Model for Religion**, discusses on how the Gujjars conceptualize their world in terms of *ruhani* (Spiritual world) and *duniya/zindagi* (world of existence). Within the *ruhani*, there is Allah, *Shaitan* and the spirits of different kinds called *tasruf* and in the *duniya/zindagi* the human beings along with all other creation of Allah are included. Thus, they construct the world into two types: One of humans and the other of Allah. Within these domains they practice their faith, try to connect with Allah and other spiritual beings. The meeting of the *ruhani* and *duniya* takes place in the sacred spaces and structures and sacred specialists. The sacred structures and spaces include *masjid*, *dargah* and to some extent the *qabar* (ancestral graves). The sacred specialists include *moulvi pir*, *murid* and *fakir*. The basic teachings of Islam spread via the medium of several religious specialists shape the

worldview of the Gujjars to a large extent and exert their control over them imperceptibly. Geertz's 'model for' reality helps in examining the above intersections, where the everyday activities in the non-symbolic relationships are tuned by the ideal norms of Islam (symbolic) so as to fit their lives in congruence with the expectations of their religion. The operation of various life cycle rituals in their lives both collectively as well as the individual effort to keep up with the ideals of Qu'ran is to become devout Muslims. They uphold the idea of connecting with Allah through the sacred specialists, especially the *pir*, who for them is an important person who deserves attention. The whole idea of a mediator between God and men brings forth the thought of how desperately people seek a better person to fulfill their needs. In other words, their social, biological and material needs get a better platform to be represented to God through the initiative of the *pir*. They emphasize that *pirs* are important as they show the *seedha raasta* (straight path), *saccha raasta* (true path) and *reham ka rasta* (path of mercy). The *pir*, even though he is a Muslim, is looked up to by people of various backgrounds, thus breaking the barriers within the normative religious practice. Secondly, it is seen that the idea of healing is connected with the *pir* though the *pir* may emphasize that it is Allah who heals. The Sufi tradition of veneration of saints like *pirs* is found to be a common practice among the Gujjars who are mostly pastoral nomads. However, Gujjars do not include many other practices of the Sufi tradition like singing or poetry.

The fifth, **Being Muslim Gujjars: the Model of Religion**, chapter describes the Gujjar Muslims' religion and world view, its construction, and the direction or guidance emanating from the tenets of Islam. Here, Geertz's 'model of' reality concept is used to understand the aspect of how Gujjars' everyday activities (pre-established non-symbolic systems) centering around individuals, family, work, cattle, nomadic lifestyle, sedentary lifestyle, *pir* and *dargah*

reverence, ancestral graves, significance of dreams, bring forth attributes of symbol structures (good and evil, paradise and hell, reward and punishment). Examining the interaction of how the people manipulate the symbol structures to fit it into their everyday activities, helps us in understanding the *model of* aspect of Gujjar religion. The Gujjars construct the human life vis-à-vis the supernatural beings-Allah and all the spirits. The spirit world consists of these types- *jinns, bhoot, jogin, jurreal, pari* and *Masan*. Broadly spoken of as *tasruf*, these kinds of spirits or quasi-spirit beings occasionally torment, oppress or even possess certain people. The interaction of humans with the spirits is important as it reveals the complicated nature of functioning where the aspects like healing techniques and testimonies of healings are shared by the Gujjars share. The way *dargahs* are mushrooming in the city and Gujjar's idea of such sacred structures, which brings together people of different faiths, is focused alongside the aspects of cattle, food and faith among the Gujjars. Spirits control the humans in terms of inflicting their malevolent effects which create fear and awe in the minds of people. In the effort to solve to such problems, people turn to various mediums. The prevalence of these many spirits is because of their lifestyle which is predominantly associated with the jungles where these spirits are also frequent. For an objective and rational mind these are reflections of fears anxieties and disliking dispositions due to restrictions imposed on their movements, forced settlements and interference of non-Muslims. Often the conversations of their everyday life revolve around trying to do good, and to speak good than doing evil or speaking wrongly. In this way, their mundane activities turn into a 'field' for fulfilling all these expectations, as a man, woman or as a sheep and goat rearer or a buffalo rearer, a milk man or woman and so on. The symbolic structures consisting of ideas of Allah, *Shaitan, Jannat, Jahanum* create permanent moods and motivations (fear of punishment and reward; ideas of good vs evil; obedience and disobedience etc) in people that produce

appropriate behaviour and psychological experiences. The Gujjars constantly keep interacting with these *models of* reality in executing the ideology and carrying out the everyday activities. Looking at the interaction of how people manipulate or try to live their everyday lives, in connection with the larger symbol structures, is what constitutes the *model of* aspect of religion. Without manipulating the symbol structures, people will cease to have a sense of direction, to function as appropriate human beings, which their religious worldview demands. It is also with the manipulation of symbol structures that they tend to create and recreate alternate ways of fitting with the pre-established non-symbolic structures. The *dargah* piety of Gujjars show their necessity to connect to Allah though it not subscribed in the Qu'ran.

The sixth chapter, **Disparities in Faith and Practice**, examines how the Gujjar religion provides room for division, alternative views when certain dogmas or interpretations are questioned. Bourdieu's field theory helps in using religion as a field of forces, acting upon individuals and groups under historical and power relations. In this perspective Gujjars as individuals engage in the interpretation of the text and various practices. There are several differences in their outlook towards their faith, the practices of an 'ideal' Islam, where people have their own versions of following and practicing their religion. We find differences in theological aspects between the Khanabadosh Dodhi Gujjars and Bakarwals where one side thinks they are better in their devotion to their faith than the other. Almost all the Gujjars are more or less influenced by belief in a variety of spirits and myths, and often are in awe and fear of the malevolent nature of spirits. This makes them to visit *pirs* and *dargahs*. Many among them however are annoyed with such practice and condemn the belief in *pirs* saying that it is against the Qu'ran or the Hadith. Transhumance lifestyle includes spending most of their time with cattle and not easy for them to keep clean and perform their religious rituals effectively on time. This activity therefore is

looked down by many sedentary Gujjars for whom cleanliness is part of the requirements or expectations of their faith which must be upheld. Other like women, and youth, who are the subordinates often resort to resistance to dominant idea. Certain alternatives are developed by poor such as visiting Ajmer instead of Mecca. Gujjars also maintain a strict Muslim identity and also exhibit the tendency to compare themselves with the Kashmiris Muslims whenever there is a discussion on religion. They often say that Islam is better than Hinduism and other religions. However, Gujjars do not mind reaching beyond their religion to get a healing experience. This chapter examines all these intersection of socio-economic, historic and cultural factors in the practice of religion among the Gujjars.

In the summary, different strands are brought together and the conclusions are drawn interpreting the empirical facts in the background of the broad theoretical perspectives adopted for the study. The followers of Islam have been dynamic in their cultural expressions and have adapted to different socio-cultural environments in the world. When it comes to the debate on how anthropologists can authentically study Muslim societies, the textual aspects as well as the contextual aspects need to be focused. However unlike suggestions by critics to anthropologists of engaging more with Islamic texts, the present study suggests that what anthropologists ought to focus is to examine the way Muslims talk of the Islamic texts and traditions, as they understand it. From this we get a perspective of what Ideal Islam is for them. Secondly, we can examine their everyday lives keeping in mind the background of how they have defined how Muslims should be. This will reveal how they actually live as Muslims. Both their textual understandings as well as lived realities need to be studied to be able to objectively represent Muslims. The important issue to be addressed is why there is a gap between the ideal and lived, and how to explain the vacuum. The controversy between ‘anthropology of Islam’ - ‘lived out’

and 'ideal' Islam, and 'Islamic anthropology' as pointed out earlier can find a solution when we consider the utility of the concepts of 'field theory' or 'practice' and 'subject' which has been employed in the present study. In general the faith of the common Gujjar seems to have been constructed and also constrained by the physical and social environment rather than deeper theological or philosophical Islam. It is a simple faith what is being taught without much questioning which of course is furnished with the concept of good and evil which holds the highest esteem.

The conclusion of this thesis articulates on some of these fundamental questions and also shows how the study of religion of Gujjar is an attempt to participate the existing debates and discussions. Geertz broad framework of the interactions between symbolic structures and pre-established non-symbolic systems help in understanding these interactions by bringing Bourdieu's field theory. The field of forces where individuals operate, as agents, have been used to understand the Gujjar's position. Within the 'field of religion/Islam', Gujjars as agents, as individuals- man, woman, or nomadic or settled, with their own set of dispositions, function in every possible way to meet the expectation of being Muslims. The *habitus* that they are in, in terms of being adherents of Islam-some strict and some casual in their practice, has been shaped by the history and personal dispositions. Their historical background of being Hindus and also their interactions with the non-Muslim neighbours over the centuries has shaped the way they live today as Muslims. It is also important to note that the fixed standard notions of Islam, in the light of nomadic pastoral communities requires a different kind of outlook, an outlook through their everyday symbols and meanings attached to that. Islam is about a God who is known to be the creator of all things all, the guardian of everything and who has the keys to the heaven and the earth. The idea of a sovereign God is quite appealing to nomads whose basic need is a

survival strategy which is very complicated with no fixed property or wealth. Thus, thinking of a powerful God who provides, protects and guides them in their journeys are part of their worldview which ultimately shapes the ethos and vice versa. However as one acquires a settled life there seem to be a tendency of acquiring more textual perspective of religion. For a pastoral nomad even in terms of practical aspects we find that the Qu'ran is not something that they would carry, touch and read casually. Nomadic lifestyle revolves being with cattle and mostly in dirty clothes and many times in grimy locations where reading is the least of the activity one would like to do. For them the idea of a sedentary life does not figure in their worldview. Also most of them are illiterate and so they are more into listening than reading the religious text. Somewhere however the Gujjars seem to be caught in between, where the idea of 'settled' and 'being on the move' clashes and we find them trying to adjust to the whole thing. When we look at the Desi Gujjars and those who by choice or by force have been settling down, they seem to be slowly adapted with the idea of a local *masjid* and religious teachings and observing the rituals as a Muslim. However on the other hand, those who are pastoral nomads and observe the seasonal migration, though not very rigid in keeping their rituals while on the move, also are welcoming the idea of attending prayers in the *masjid* regularly. Any religion based on the textual tradition, mostly thrive on settled population mostly and for nomads things are difficult and so we find them trying to adjust according to circumstances. All the long journeys they cover together strengthens their ethnic identity as a group which gets threatened when the ideas of settling them down comes. In addition their ideas of faith and lived Islam, also tend to clash with that of the settled population. Thus when we are understand about Gujjar religion, we have to keep in mind the various socio-cultural milieu and also geographical considerations, as all these contributes in their ideas of faith and piety in their everyday lives.