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## INTRODUCTION

People belonging to the Scheduled Tribes live across all 20 districts of Jammu and Kashmir. They constitute around 12 per cent of the Jammu and Kashmir population. Amongst the Scheduled Tribes, Gujjars constitute the largest recognised tribe. The existing literature suggests that Gujjars are predominantly nomadic, that they are mainly shepherds by occupation, and that they live in self-sufficient households. The present study is an attempt to question the validity of these characteristics in contemporary times using data collected from a field survey of 1,346 Gujar households across Jammu and Kashmir.

The people of the Scheduled Tribes have historically been subjected to multiple forms of deprivations, including lack of access to land (Bakshi 2008). While democratic governments have historically sought classical land reform policies to bring about equality in landholding, these are no longer on the agenda under neoliberal policy. People belonging to the Scheduled Tribes continue to remain predominantly landless and resource-scarce today.

Among Scheduled Tribes, nomadic people have the least and declining access to land and land rights (Gilbert 2007). Without a fixed place of dwelling, these groups move from one place to another. On the basis of an extensive review of the legal literature, Gilbert identified a special corpus of human rights laws that are dedicated to the rights of tribal communities. He believes that this corpus can be used to resolve the issue of the requirement of "effective occupation" in ensuring land ownership for nomadic people. While these laws have been in existence for a long time, countries have effectively failed to implement them to safeguard the lives and rights of tribal communities across the globe. Extending the discussion to the Indian context, in a recent study, Lal (2023), using secondary data, claimed that some nomadic tribes in India continue to follow the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, while most of them have become pastoral nomads. The findings of the study demonstrate that the laws of the Indian Constitution have been weak and ineffective in safeguarding the well-being, land rights, and settlement of Scheduled Tribes across India (Lal 2023).

In Jammu and Kashmir, Gujjars and Bakarwals are the two main Scheduled Tribes. Of the total Scheduled Tribe population in Jammu and Kashmir, Gujjars constitute 69 per cent (1.5 million people in the Census 2011), making them the largest Scheduled Tribe group in the region. The literature on the socio-economic status of the Gujjars is thin.

A review of reliable literature, most of which comes from Gujar educationists, brings out some broad characteristics of the population. Warikoo and Som (2008), Rahi (2011), and Vaid (2017) argue that historically, Gujjars have been pastoral shepherds. Javaid Rahi (2011) argues that historically, Scheduled Tribes, apart from being nomadic, have primarily been shepherds. Their economy has been identified as self-sufficient (Ahmed and Ahmed 2019). These studies have relied on either secondary sources of data that are not from the last few decades or have based their opinions on small-scale studies, selecting one or two villages in a single district. Do the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir continue to be nomadic? Does sheep rearing continue to be their major occupation? Are they still self-sufficient? To answer these questions and to gain an understanding of the demographic and socio-economic features of Gujjars, a State-level field study was conducted, covering all 20 districts of Jammu and Kashmir.

## DATA AND METHODS

The sample size for the entire study was 1,500 households. Of these, 154 were Bakarwal households, and were thus not included in the present analysis. A questionnaire-based sample survey of 1,346 households was conducted in 2024. District-wise data from Census 2011 were used to rank districts by the size of the Scheduled Tribe population. The proportional sampling method was used to determine the district-level sample size. Within each district, *tehsils* with Scheduled Tribe populations were identified. Within the identified *tehsils*, villages were selected randomly for sampling. The *tehsil*- and district-wise sample size has been given in Appendix Table 1. A total of 39 villages were sampled. Of these, 21 belong to Jammu division and 18 belong to Kashmir. A total of 1,346 households belonging to the Gujar community were surveyed, dividing the district-level sample size by the number of villages sampled. The main respondent was the head of the household. Therefore, the terms "respondent" and "household head" have been used interchangeably in the text. Data on selected variables, including residential status, housing, occupation, assets, agricultural practices, and household income were collected.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey data show that the household head is the main decision-maker of the household. The field analysis showed that 96 per cent of households were headed by the eldest male member of the family. Only 4 per cent households were headed by the (eldest) female member of the family. The average age of the household head was reported to be 46 years, and 65 per cent of the household heads were reported to be illiterate.

The field survey revealed that the Gujar population is present across all 20 districts of Jammu and Kashmir. Table 1 presents information on the settlement status of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir. Around 97 per cent of Gujjars have given up the nomadic lifestyle. Over the past three to four decades, households have