

## **Socio-cultural Study on Tribal Communities of Uttarakhand**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Uttarakhand state has consisted mainly five tribal communities namely, Tharu, Buxa, Bhotia, Jaunsari and Raji. The tribal communities have settled mainly in hilly areas of Garhwal and Kumaun region as Chakarata and Kalsi regions of Dehradun district and Rawain (Uttarkashi), Almora, Cahmoli, Pithoragarh, Bageshwar and Nainital. These tribal communities have their own different social-cultural traditions and dependant basically an agricultural cum pastoral community based on crude type of agricultural cultivation and animal husbandry. These indigenous tribes and communities have been flourished in Uttarakhand today and maintained their distinct rich cultural heritage and social traditions.

**Key Words :** Socio- culture, Tribal community, Uttarakhand

### **INTRODUCTION**

A tribe is collection of families or group of families bearing a common name, member of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and follow certain social customs regarding marriage, profession, or occupation and have developed a well assessed social system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations (Majumdar, 1961). The term 'culture' refers to the complex collection of knowledge, folklore, languages, rules, rituals, habits, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, and customs that links and gives a common identity to a particular group of people at a specific point in time. Uttarakhand is a newly originated state of India, consisting of outstanding natural hilly regions named Garhwal and Kumaun .These hilly regions have different lingual and cultural influence due to proximity and neighbourhood of different traditional cultures (Mohanty, 2006). The Uttarakhand state contributes only 0.83% to total and 0.3 to the tribal population of India. Tribes of Uttarakhand represent the ethnic groups residing in the state. Every district of Uttarakhand has more or less a moderate percentage of tribal population. In the state of

Uttarakhand, the main concentration of tribal population is in the rural areas. As per records, around 94.50 per cent of total tribal population resides in rural areas and the remaining percentage of tribal population lives in urban centres. Geographically, the scheduled tribal communities of Uttarakhand may be categorised as the tribes of the sub Himalayan region of the North and North-West India. The Uttarakhand state has consisted mainly five tribal communities namely, Tharu, Buxa, Bhotia, Jaunsari and Raji. Further, these tribes can be divided into two groups as hill tribes comprises Jaunsari, Bhotia and Raji, whereas Tarai tribes are Tharu, and Buxa (Bisht, 1994).

#### **Jaunsari:**

At present Jaunsari community dwells in the Jaunsar- Bawar area of the Chakarata and Kalsi regions of Dehradun district and Rawain (Uttarkashi) of Uttarakhand. They have constituted as high caste position of the cis-Himalayan region as either Rajput or Brahmin. Jaunsaris are well known for their customs, costumes and particular socio-cultural values (Mukherjee, 1963). Jaunsaris follows caste hierarchy namely as Bhaman, Rajput, Baddi, Bajki, Nai, Deov, Lohar, Sonar,

Kolla and Nat. Their family structure adopted basically polyandrous. Inter caste marriage and hyper-hypogamous unions exist in Jaunsaris society. Jaunsaris are mostly resemble with mangoloid as well as Indo-Aryan groups and claimed that they are descendants of Pandavas of Mahabharata; therefore they worship them as Gods. Jaunsaris have their own God, the principal one being Mahasu (Naswa, 2001). The Jaunsaris are basically an agricultural cum postoral community based on crude type of cultivation and animal husbandry. They extract wool from the sheep and manufacture woolen stuffs for their use and business. The traditional craft of Jaunsaris is weaving. These tribal communities have most preferred to follow their own folk culture and ancient social traditions (Bisht, 2006).

### **Bhotia:**

Basically, the term 'Bhotia' indicates to a territorial group dwelling in the 'Bhot' tract. Bhotias are mongoloid ethnic tribal community, traditionally lived in the high Himalayan region. This tribal community basically dominated in districts as Almora, Cahmoli, Pithoragarh, Bageshwar and Uttarakashi. Bhotias are subdivided into three main categories: The Jads of Uttarakashi, the Marchas (mainly traders) and Tolchos (Farmer) of Chamoli and the Shaukes of Pithoragarh (near Dharchula). According to Ram Rahul (1970) claimed that the Jods as Bhotias of Uttarakasi in Uttarakhand were migrated from Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh. The Jads Bhotia communities are followers of Buddhism and Shaukes have faith on Hindu- Buddhist cultures but both communities rely on lamas to conduct ceremonies and rituals. Bhotias are traditionally followed caste system as per existed settle region of Uttarakhand and one sub caste as Doms under lower category (Mohanty, 2006). The Bhotia community is known as the international traders to perform their trades between Tibet and India. The Bhotia is an agricultural cum pastoral community and mainly actively engaged in making woolen articles. Weaving of woolen yarn and making woolen stuffs like carpet, blanket, sweater and also their traditional costumes have been the craft specialty of the Bhotias (Bisht, 2006). The Bhotias are very fond of drinking liquor prepared with indigenous ways from rice baking and local fruits. There is hardly any socio-religious ceremony in which liquor is not used (Prasad and Kapoor, 1998). All Bhotia communities used to multi lingual and speaks Tibetan, Kumauni, Garhwali and Hindi.

### **Raji:**

Rajis are also known as Vanraji, Nan-Rawat (king of forest) and Van-Manush (Wildman or man of forest) in Uttarakhand. The Rajis tribal community is a native endangered ethnic minority group and inhabited in the district of Pithoragarh, Champawat and Udham Singh Nagar of Uttarakhand. The Rajis have their own dialect; however they can speak and interact in Kumauni-Pahari dialect as well as in broken Hindi language. They are smallest tribal group and basically nomadic hunter gatherers, but now they are engaged in labour intensive works in agricultural activities and other skill based work as carpentry and boat making etc. (Singh, 1994). Rajis are famous for making wooden bowls and agricultural tools for their livelihoods but this system has now almost vanished due to non availability of Genti wood (Naswa, 2001). Land and forests are the primary economic resources of Rajis. Rajis are very much alike of the low Hindu caste and exhibited a mixed racial traits of Aryo-Dravidians and Mongoloids. Rajis themselves are of Hindu origin and their own peculiar Gods but they also worship those of Hindus, attributed great power to local deities, spirits, goblins and defined men (Atkinson, 1982). Presently, Rajis have to make more social reforms to join the main stream of Kumauni society in Uttarakhand.

### **Tharu:**

Tharu is a dominated tribal community and inhabited in Khatima and Sitarganj tehsil of Udham Singh Nagar, Nainital, Pauri and Dehradun districts of Uttarakhand. According to legends, Tharus are of the Rajput origin to the Sisodiya a kin of Rana Pratap in Chittaurh. But, Majumdar (1961) has proved that there are no traces as to affine the Tharus with Sisodiya Rajput as while Crooke (1973) established an origin trend of Tharus with mixed tribe Mangolian and some Dravidean blood, who occupy the malarious Tarai region at the foot hills of lower Himalayas. According to Rahman and Ansari (2007), Tharus are not originally belong to hilly regions of Uttarakhand, but they were migrated from the Thar desert of Rajasthan. Bisht (2006) mentioned that Tharus may be divided into seven endogamous groups viz., Ranas, bukhasa, Garhaurha, Dhannara, Khunka Jugiya and Saunra. Tharu is the monogamous tribal community, followed the rules of patriarchy for lineage and patriarchal to live after marriage. Tharu is the monogamous tribal community, who follow the rules of patriarchy for lineage and patrilocal to live after marriage (Srivastava, 1958).

The Tharus women have a higher social position in the family system. The woman folk is more privileged class among Tharus. Tharus are Hindu by religion and worshiped all deities of the Hindu along with a pantheon of their own ancient gods. They call themselves Hindu by religion and celebrate the festival of holi, dipawali and teej along with their distinguished customary tribal festival like charai. Tharus are skilled craftsmen and well trained in weaving of baskets, mats construction of houses, rope making, herbs for brewing drinks etc. (Joshi and Saklani, 1998). Tharus communities are mainly occupied with agriculture, hunting, fishing, animal husbandry and forestry for their livelihood.

### **Buxa:**

The Buxa tribal community is scattered in different patches in Udham Singh Nagar and Dehradun valley. The ancestors of Buxa tribals had the long beard resembling the Bok, hence they called the Bokasa or Buxas or Bhuksas. This tribe had no caste or subcaste difference among its members. Buksas have claimed themselves as Panwar Rajputs and worshipper of goddess Durga. It is observed that Buxa community belongs to different migrated castes and they were settled in different hilly patches due to some adverse geo-social circumstances in Uttarakhand. According to Bisht (2006), Bhuksas are non-aryan family and famous for their nomadism characteristics as settled in the isolated and quietly uninhabited provinces of Tarai-Bhabar of Nainital and Dehradun districts. Buxas are originally belonged to various Hindu castes and sub castes from Kshatriyas to Sudras. At present, Buxas are believed in Hindu cultures and followed their social traditions, worship Hindu gods and speak Hindi language with some admixture of local Kumauni and Garhwali dialect. They are strictly maintained patrimonial system and their women have a higher place in the family (Hasan, 1979).

Several indigenous tribes and communities flourish in Uttarakhand state today maintaining their distinct cultural heritage and traditions. The several fairs and festivals celebrated by the tribes such as Bhotias (Shaukas), Tharus, Buxas and Jaunsaris are opportunities for the locals and the visitors to witness these events as opportunities to keep the traditional modes of life and art

alive apart from providing them the recognition they so strongly deserve in Uttarakhand.

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