

## **Expression of Socio-Cultural Rituals in Gojri - An Ethnolinguistic Study**

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### **Abstract**

The present study explores Gojri as a storehouse of the socio-cultural rituals of the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir. It examines the specific terms used in their language to describe religious and cultural rituals. The study is based on the data collected through participant observation and interview by the researchers.

**Keywords:** Socio-cultural rituals, Gujjars, Ethno-linguistics

### **1. Introduction**

An ethno-linguistic study involves a description of culture, sub-cultures of the group of people with distinctive lifestyles. It is that part of anthropological linguistics which is concerned with the study of the interrelation between a language and the cultural behavior of those who speak it.

Several controversial questions are involved in this field: Does language shape culture or vice versa? What influence does language have on perception and thought? How do language patterns relate to cultural patterns? It describes the people, their customs, the events in which they participate, and their conversations. It also describes the things they use like food, clothing, shelter and utensils in their day to day life. Other aspects of life that could be examined include – kinship structure, religious rituals, behavior, political systems and leisure activities and the use of language in various domains of situations. Other aspects of daily life including social interactions and conversations are also studied by ethno-linguists. Most ethno-linguistic studies attempt to provide some interpretations of the meaning in cultural forms.

## **2. Culture and Language**

Culture has been defined in a variety of ways by anthropologists which, most of the times, includes notions of shared values, beliefs, expectations, customs, jargon, and rituals. Quinn and Holland (1987:4) defined culture as shared knowledge, what people must know in order to act as they do, make the things as they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way as they do. Language, on the other hand, is the set of common sounds and symbols by which individuals communicate. Both language and culture are symbolic systems. The lexemes of a language convey the meanings which in turn are representations of the cultural entities (material as well as non material).

Language is the mirror of culture, in the sense that people visualize culture through their language. Many linguists have explored the relationship between language and culture. Nida (1998: 29) holds the view that language and culture are two symbolic systems. Whatever we say in language has meaning be they designative or sociative, denotative or connotative and so on. Culture is represented in language by the content words, the connotative use of the words, the ideas in the discourse for instance in text or speech, the preconceptions behind a speech act, the sociolinguistic conventions and so on.

## **3. Methodology**

The data for the present paper was collected as per the proper ethnographic guidelines. The major research techniques involved were participant observation and key informant interviewing. Participant observation allows a deeper emersion into culture studied, hence resulting in a deeper understanding of a culture. Intense open ended repeated interviews were conducted for the investigation of cultural patterns. Also well informed and reliable informants were chosen for the strict assurance of the representative sample. The informants were trained to systematically report cultural data and recognize significant cultural elements and inter connections as the interview sequence unfolds. Both open and close end interviews were conducted. The close end interviews were based on properly formulated questionnaire. The data recorded was then analyzed carefully and formally written down.

Our primary research was carried out in the area of Fakir Gujjari (Harwan- dara, which comes under the district Srinagar). Fakir Gujri is situated in the footsteps of the beautiful hillock of Mahadev and 25 kms. from the main city of Srinagar (Lal Chowk). This colony is spread over 50-60 sq kms. of land.

#### 4. The Gujjars

‘Gujjars’ constitute a separate ethnic group with absolute conservatism in the preservation of their identity. The Gujjars who are settled in Kashmir are not originally from Kashmir. It is believed that they were basically Rajputs who have migrated for various reasons from Kathiawad region of Gujrat and Hazara district to Jammu and Kashmir. The ethnologist Ibbetson writes that a Gujjar kingdom existed in Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir and Gujrat around 5AD up to 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. With the Muslim invasions from 11<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards the Kingdom disintegrated and many Gujjars were converted to Islam, forcing others to flee to the foot hills of Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, etc. and led nomadic lives. Gujjars are settled in various parts of Jammu and Kashmir like Poonch, Rajouri, Tangdar, Gurez, Srinagar, Uri, and Pahalgam. Rahi, J. (2011).

Gujjars speak Gojri which is a classified language. ‘Gojri’ is the identity of the ‘Gujjars’ which separates them from other people and makes them ethnically different. Apart from their indigenous language (Gojri also known as Gojir

bu’l) Gujjars are also proficient in other languages as well and hence show multi-lingualism. They are proficient in Kashmiri, Pahari, Bakarwali and Urdu. This multi-lingual nature is due to the language contact. Gujjars are very poor and backward. They are not indulged in any fixed occupational activity, nor are they into any government jobs, except a few, among the educated younger generation, who work in educational sector. Traditionally Gujjars were pastoralists, but now most of them practice settled agriculture and animal husbandry rearing cattle. ‘Gujjars’ were mostly believed to be herdsmen; many of them possess minor pieces of land on the mountain foothills. Most of them own barrack-type shelters made of wooden logs called ‘dhokes’ on the upper reaches, but they differ from ‘Bakerwals’, (who belong to the same ethnic stock, and largely depend on sheep and goats for their livelihood) who are nomadic.

## 5. Socio-cultural Expressions

Culture is the idea, custom and belief of a community and language is the verbal expression of culture. The linguistic utterances of language help us to understand the culture of a speech community. Language is used to express one's ideas thus expressing the worldview of that culture. Culture and language are deeply related in that language can be used to reflect the culture of a particular society or the language can reflect the culture and its world view. Language is used to express and sustain culture and cultural associations that exist in a given society. Different ideas result from the use of different languages within a culture. World view is a structure consisting of ideas and beliefs through which a person interprets the world around him and also the world view determines how the person interacts with it. World view can be shaped by the culture and language that is common in a particular society. This is because people in a society use their language to express their culture thus expressing the world view in that society.

The present study is a preliminary one which attempts to describe socio-cultural rituals among Gujjars through their language. Gujjar culture is reflected through various folk custom practices like birth, marriage and death. The paper is an attempt to understand the social and cultural meaning creation processes. The socio-cultural expressions described in this paper are the expressions associated with the rituals of Birth, Marriage and Death.

### 5.1 Marriage Rituals

b<sup>h</sup>and<sup>o</sup> sut<sup>fo</sup> kar-un  
pot fix do-INF  
'To fix a pot'

The actual meaning of the above expression is fixing up the marriage. This custom is performed by the family of the boy and girl who are going to get engaged. In this custom the in-laws of the girl deposit an amount of eleven hundred rupees which is a symbolic exchange of their son and daughter. The utterance *ri<sup>fo</sup> humne usko le lijo* is used by the groom's family, meaning that they have fixed the marriage.

lakɽi kar-an tʃal-ijo:  
Wood do-PRS go-PST  
'Went for wood collection'

*lakɽi* in Gojri means wood and *karan tʃalijo* means to collect. Thus the utterance *lakɽi karan tʃalijo* means collecting the firewood from the jungle which is to be used in the marriage ceremony. In this ritual friends and relatives take part. They form a group known as '*le:tri*' in 'Gojri'. They collectively go to the forest to collect firewood (*dʒujã karan*) to cook food for marriage ceremony.

vah ma: sadan tʃal-ija  
Marriage LOC invite go-PST  
'went to invite'

*vah* in Gojri means 'marriage' and *sadan tʃalija* means 'to invite'. Thus the utterance *vah ma: sadan tʃalija* means 'to invite for marriage'. It defines an invitation ceremony. In olden days, the trend of sending invitation cards was not a part of their culture. In those days the invitation was given by paying a personal visit to the houses of relatives, neighbors and friends.

bətʃfo tʃoɽi tʃoli me rak<sup>h</sup>-ã:  
Child 2SG.GEN lap LOC Keep-PST  
'Kept the child in your lap'

There is a tradition of keeping a small child in brides lap called */bətʃfo tʃoɽI tʃoli me rak<sup>h</sup>ã:/*. */bətʃfo:/* means child, */tʃoɽi tʃoli /* means your lap, me *ra<sup>h</sup>k<sup>h</sup>ã:* means to keep. The bride's mother-in-law makes the child to sit in her lap. Doing this is considered a good omen. The bride is blessed with the wishes of conceiving soon.

## 5.2 Birth Rituals

is-na: gədra dʒam gi-o:

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She-ERG son freeze do-PST

‘She has given birth to a son’

It means the female has given birth to a baby boy.

dʒam gʲo in normal situations means “froze”.

But its meaning is culture specific in the present context which in other words means that this meaning is created specifically by the Gujjar socio-cultural context.

satmoh ko paṅi kal-a

Seventh GEN water pour-PST

‘Poured seventh water’

The first bath after the child birth is a major event.

This is done after the seventh day of delivery.

The pouring of water on the seventh day is known as *satmoh ko paṅi kala:*. The bath on seventh day is considered to be the ceremonial bath and was originally purification rights in the ancient times.

This bath is taken to protect the new mother and baby from the diseases and other harms

paṅi pakko ho g-*io*

Water ripe happen go-PST

‘Water was ripe’

When the mother of the newly born child has to take her first purification bath, special preparations are made.

The water to be poured at the time of purification bath is boiled along with some wild herbs (lous gas).

Then a spade known as /*dedʒ*/ (an iron instrument with wooden handle, used to dig the land) is immersed into this boiling water, as they believe that by doing so the water is purified.

When the water is ready for the bath the utterance/ *paŋi pakko ho gio* /is used

/tʃa:li doh pa:t za:r ka:s-an/

fourty day after hair shave.PRS

‘to shave the hair of new born child’

The utterance /*tʃa:li doh pa:t za:r ka:san*/ means to shave the head of the newly born baby after forty days.

The head shaving ceremony is known as /*za:r ka:san*/.

The cultural belief associated with this ritual is that shaving the hair of the head provides the child with strength and opens up the pores of the skin.

It is believed that by doing so it is beneficial for eye sight, hearing and sense of smell

### 5.3 Death Rituals

pa:ŋi tu kaʃ-jo:

Water LOC remove-PST

‘Removed water’

The utterance/ *pa:ŋi tu kaʃjo*/ is used when the corpse is given final purification bath. The purpose of this is to physically cleanse the corpse. It is an essential ritual of the Sunnah among the Muslim Gujjars.

mezma:n a:-ja ta:zijat ko:

Guest come-PST condolence ABL

‘Guests came for condolence’

The mourners who visit the bereaved family are referred to as /mezma:an a:ya ta:zijat ko:/ For a period of three days the food and the tea for the bereaved family is arranged by the relatives or neighbors. The utterance /tre din ka:r roti nai pakaṇi /is used meaning food is not to be cooked for three days. On the fourth day (tʃɔ:tʰ) the bereaved family prepares tea (tʃɔ:tʰ ki: tʃa:).

## Conclusion

The paper presents an ethnolinguistic approach to study meaning creation by culture. Word or an utterance is taken as a symbolic form which acquires culture specific meanings when placed in specific cultural utterances. This study shows how culture imparts meaning to words or utterances which is different from the literal or denotative meaning. It also demonstrates how meaning generation is culture specific that is something can symbolize one thing in one culture and another thing in another culture.

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