

Tribes of Jammu and Kashmir, Culture, List, Lifestyle, Schemes

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Tribes of Jammu and Kashmir form an important part of the region's identity, as it is home to a variety of **tribal communities** living across **mountains, valleys, and high-altitude regions**, contributing to its rich **cultural diversity, traditions, and heritage**. Many of these tribes follow a **nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle**, mainly engaged in **animal rearing and pastoral activities**. Major tribes such as **Gujjar, Bakarwal, Gaddi, Sippi, Balti, Changpa, and Brokpa** have their own distinct **language, customs, and way of life**, and are recognized as **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**, playing an important role in the **social and economic structure** of the region.

Tribes of Jammu and Kashmir

- Jammu and Kashmir are a land inhabited by various **Tribal groups**, spread across the **Hill State**, making its **culture and tradition richer and colourful**.
- Eight communities – **Balti, Beda, Bot, Brookpa, Changpa, Garra, Mon, Purigpa** and **Bakarwals, Gujjars, Gaddis, Sippis** were notified as **Scheduled Tribes** under the **Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 1991**.

- All the **twelve (12) Scheduled Tribes (STs)** were first enumerated in the **2001 Census** with population **1,105,979**, forming **10.9% of the State population** and **1.3% of the country's tribal population**.
- Major tribes: **Balti, Beda, Bot/Boto, Brokpa/Drokpa/Dard/Shin, Changpa, Garra, Mon, Purigpa, Gujjar, Bakarwal, Gaddi, Sippi**.

Bakarwal Tribe

- The Bakarwal Tribe is a **nomadic pastoral community** mainly found in the **Pir Panjal Range** of Jammu & Kashmir and nearby Himalayan regions.
- They are widely distributed across **Jammu, Kashmir Valley, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Punjab**, showing a strong pattern of **seasonal movement**.
- The term **"Bakarwal"** comes from **"Bakri/Bakar" (goat)** and **"Wal" (caretaker)**, meaning **"goat herder"**, which reflects their traditional identity.
- Their main occupation is **animal husbandry**, especially rearing **sheep and goats** for milk, wool, and meat.
- They practice **transhumance (seasonal migration)**, moving to **high-altitude pastures in summer** and returning to **lowlands in winter**.
- Their lifestyle is **simple, mobile, and isolated**, as they live in **temporary shelters or tents** during migration.
- They usually travel in **small family groups** along with their livestock, ensuring survival in harsh conditions.
- Their culture, language, and dress show strong similarities with the **Gujjar community**, indicating close ethnic connections.
- Bakarwal men are often identified by their **long beards and traditional attire**, reflecting their cultural identity.

Balti Tribe

- The Balti Tribe is a **Scheduled Tribe** mainly settled in the **Suru Valley of Ladakh and Kargil region**.
- They are believed to have a mixed origin of **Dardic and Tibetan (Mongoloid) ancestry**, making their identity culturally unique.
- The majority of Baltis follow **Shia Islam**, along with the **Noorbakshi Sufi order**, which plays an important role in their spiritual life.
- They speak the **Balti language**, which has strong roots in the **Tibetan linguistic family**.
- Their primary occupation is **animal husbandry**, along with **horticulture, trade, and labor work**.
- Their culture reflects a rich blend of **Tibetan, Islamic, and Indian influences**, visible in daily life and traditions.
- Their traditional houses are **flat-roofed, white-painted, and inward sloping**, showing strong **Tibetan architectural influence**.
- They also follow **Muta (temporary marriage)** and participate in **Sufi spiritual practices in Khankahs**.
- The Baltis are known for being **hospitable, culturally rich, and deeply rooted in tradition**, while still preserving elements of **pre-Islamic beliefs**.

Dogra Tribe

- The Dogra Tribe mainly inhabits the **Jammu region** and forms a significant cultural group of the area.
- They are believed to be descendants of **Aryan settlers** who migrated and settled in the **southern hills of Kashmir**.
- The community includes both **Hindu and Muslim Dogras**, reflecting **religious diversity** within the same cultural group.
- Their primary language is **Dogri**, which has a rich tradition of **folk literature, songs, and oral storytelling**.
- Dogri folk songs express themes of **love, bravery, sacrifice, and family relationships**, forming an important part of their culture.
- Marriage customs include practices like **Dohry (exchange marriage)** and **Chadar Pana (widow remarriage)**, along with **clan exogamy**.
- Their traditional dress includes **kurta-pajama and turban for men** and **pheran and headgear for women**, suited to the climate.
- The Dogras are known for their **strong social structure, martial traditions, and rich cultural heritage**.

Changpa Tribe

- The Changpa Tribe is a **nomadic tribal community** living in the **Changthang Plateau of Ladakh**, one of the harshest regions.
- They survive in **extreme climatic conditions**, where temperatures can drop to **-50°C** and altitude ranges between **3600-4500 meters**.
- Their main occupation is **animal husbandry**, especially rearing **Pashmina goats**, which produce valuable **Pashmina wool**.
- They also practice **barley cultivation, salt collection, and small trade** to support their livelihood.
- They live in **portable tents made of yak hair**, which help them adapt to their **mobile lifestyle**.
- Their society is divided into **regional groups**, each with its own **grazing land and leadership system**.
- Most Changpas follow **Tibetan Buddhism (Drukpa sect)**, while some have adopted **Islam**.
- They strongly believe in a **three-tier cosmic system (heaven, earth, and underworld)** connected with colors and spiritual meaning.
- Animals are treated as **sacred beings**, and special animals are **blessed and never harmed**, reflecting deep spiritual beliefs.
- Their wealth and social status are measured in terms of **livestock ownership**, especially sheep, goats, and yaks.

Brokpa Tribe

- The Brokpa Tribe is mainly found in the **Dras Valley and Dah-Hanu region of Ladakh**.
- They are believed to be descendants of the **Dardic (Indo-Aryan) people**, giving them a distinct historical identity.
- The Brokpa are known for their **unique physical features, preserved traditions, and cultural isolation**.
- Their language is **Shina**, which belongs to the **Indo-European language family**, and some also speak Balti.

- Their main occupations include **agriculture, animal husbandry, and allied activities**.
- They are famous for their **colorful traditional dress**, especially the **floral headgear worn by women**.
- Their culture includes **festivals, ornaments, music, and strong community traditions**.
- They follow both **Buddhism and Islam**, along with **local customs and spiritual beliefs**.
- The Brokpa tribe is considered one of the most **culturally distinct and well-preserved tribal communities** in India.

Constitutional Safeguards for the Tribes of Jammu and Kashmir

- **Recognition under Scheduled Tribe framework:** Tribal communities in Jammu and Kashmir are recognized through the **Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1989**, which formally identifies them as Scheduled Tribes and enables access to constitutional protections and welfare measures.
- **Equality and protective discrimination:** Articles **14, 15, and 16** of the Indian Constitution guarantee **equality before law** while allowing the State to make **special provisions for the advancement of Scheduled Tribes**, ensuring balanced social justice.
- **Directive for welfare and development:** **Article 46** directs the State to promote the **educational and economic interests of Scheduled Tribes** and protect them from social injustice and exploitation.
- **Political representation:** Provisions under **Articles 330 and 332** ensure **reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in legislative bodies**, including representation in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly after delimitation.
- **Reservation in employment and education:** Constitutional provisions support **affirmative action policies**, providing reservation for Scheduled Tribes in **government jobs and educational institutions**, improving access to opportunities.
- **Forest Rights Act, 2006:** The extension of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** to Jammu and Kashmir recognizes the **rights of forest-dwelling tribal communities over land, forest resources, and traditional habitats**, ensuring legal protection of their livelihood base.
- **Protection from exploitation:** Constitutional safeguards, along with supporting laws, aim to prevent **social discrimination, economic exploitation, and land alienation** of tribal communities.
- **Administrative and welfare provisions:** Various government schemes and institutional mechanisms operate under constitutional provisions to support **healthcare, education, housing, and livelihood development** for Scheduled Tribes in the region.

Key Government Schemes for Tribal Empowerment

- **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan** – This scheme focuses on holistic development of tribal villages by improving infrastructure, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities, covering around 63,000 villages and benefiting over 5 crore tribal people.
- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** – Provides quality residential education to tribal students from Class VI to XII, with modern facilities aimed at improving academic performance, skill development, and access to higher education.
- **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN)** – Targets Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) by improving road connectivity, housing, electrification, healthcare, and basic services.

in remote tribal regions.

- **National Overseas Scholarship for ST Students** – Enables meritorious tribal students to pursue higher education abroad, promoting global exposure and academic excellence.
- **Support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs)** – Promotes research, documentation, and preservation of tribal culture, traditions, and languages while supporting policy development.
- **Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST)** – Ensures coordinated efforts across ministries for tribal welfare, focusing on filling gaps in education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- **National Fellowship for ST Students** – Provides financial assistance for higher education and research through a transparent digital system, encouraging advanced studies among tribal students.
- **National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC)** – Offers concessional financial support to tribal individuals for self-employment and income-generating activities.
- **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)** – Promotes tribal products through marketing platforms, supporting artisans and creating sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- **Aadi Mahotsav and Cultural Initiatives** – Organizes cultural festivals to showcase tribal heritage, promote handicrafts, and generate economic opportunities through cultural promotion.
- **Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY)** – Aims to develop tribal-majority villages by providing basic infrastructure such as roads, drinking water, and housing.
- **National Health Mission (NHM) – Tribal Focus** – Strengthens healthcare services in tribal areas, addressing major health issues and improving access to medical facilities.

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