

Exploring the Indigenous Tribes of Garhwal: An Analytical Perspective

Author

Abstract-

Garhwal, a region of considerable significance nestled in the expansive Himalayan range, presents a history that is as fragmented as it is intriguing. The tribes inhabiting this land bear a past shrouded in vagueness, lacking comprehensive documentation. Despite this historical obscurity, their cultural fabric remains exceptionally rich, woven predominantly through oral traditions rather than written archives. The nuanced tapestry of their customs, beliefs, and societal structures has been meticulously preserved through generations, passed down in the form of legends, songs, and rituals.

Thus, the primary objective of this paper is to delve into and contextualize the enduring cultural agencies that these tribes have perpetuated from time immemorial. By examining these cultural agencies—be they traditional practices, artistic expressions, communal rituals, or socio-political frameworks—we aim to illuminate the intricate dynamics that have shaped and sustained their unique cultural identity amidst the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Through this exploration, we seek to capture not only the resilience and adaptability of these tribes but also their invaluable contributions to the broader tapestry of human cultural diversity.

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I. Introduction-

Society is a construct of all the entities present and is interrelated and co-dependent. It does not only comprise man, instead, it is a construct of all that exists in the surrounding. Thus, we might say that it is a mélange of man and the environment, whether organic or inorganic. Ginsberg justifies this mélange as he states:

“If anything is well-established, it is that all parts of social life are intimately related and interwoven. If society is not an organism, it certainly has something organic in its nature, in the sense that its parts function together and that changes at one point have repercussions that affects the whole.”¹

So, if one wants to study the society of a particular region, one must inspect each unit to study it. Thus, in the given paper, various tribes confined in the Garhwal region shall be discussed, along with an attempt to trace the co-relation between them.

To begin with, David Ronfeldt’s societal progress from tribal to network form is quite convincing. He states that tribal form emerged thousands of years ago and was the first to emerge and mature. The second is the Institutional form, which peculiarizes the state and military formations. The third one is market form, which appeared in the 19th century and favored laissez-faire, and the fourth was the age of globalization, which he referred to as the network phase.²

In classifying human society, Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski typified them into hunting and gathering community, horticulture society, agrarian society, industrial society, and so on.³ Likewise, Indian culture could broadly be categorized into primitive hunters and food gatherers, nomads, shifting cultivators, settled agriculturists, traders, artisans, etc.⁴

This evolution of human society has a parallel with the tribal community. From Aryan tribes to various indigenous and foreign tribes invading here and assimilating themselves in the Vedic strata confirms this evolutionary pattern. Gradually, some intermixed so that it becomes unrecognizable to distinguish them. As Christopher Von puts it, infiltration of the advanced population has resulted in fading of cultural distinction. On the other hand, aboriginals who maintained their unique identity and stayed far from the clutches of mainstream society managed to keep a hold over their cultures and customs.⁵

Certainly, they existed for a long time in the past, and even though their practices remained discriminatory as per the advanced society, they were not treated as untouchables, the colonials were the first to address them as aborigines⁶ and specified them as-

“(Tribe) collection of families, or group of families, bearing a common name which, as rule, does not denote any specific occupation; generally claiming common descent from an animal, but in some part of the country held together rather by the obligation of blood feud than by the tradition of kinship; usually speaking the same language; and occupying, or claiming to occupy a definite tract of land.”⁷

It was observed that many amalgamated with general mass, about which S.C. Dube reiterates the effect of interaction between tribes and non-tribes. He informs that this interaction can be viewed from the perspective of acculturation, which reflects the subsequent change in the cultural pattern, assimilation vis a vis loss of

cultural identity, and integration in the sense of mutual give-and-take relationship between tribes and non-tribes.⁸

In presenting anthropologists' views, E.H. Carr expresses that primitive men are less individual and more completely molded by their society than civilized men. He further posits that more straightforward organizations are more united as the community provides opportunities for their skills and occupation. In contrast, this might be the case in more advanced societies.⁹ Thus, understanding their cultures, customs, and even their past is a matter of comprehending a history that separates the history of mainstreams. Therefore, understanding them entirely means understanding how they managed to preserve their characteristics, dwelling in caves and hill corners, generally in a primitive state.¹⁰ It became evident that the groups that they labeled as tribes lived in relative isolation, and even after independence, they were conceded on similar lines. Gaya Pandey delineates various characteristics of a tribe, a few of which are given as follows-

1. Definite geographical location
2. Solid affinity and bond between individuals.
3. Non-complex societal setup
4. Prevalence of magic and superstitions.
5. Presence of autonomy among tribal people.¹¹

Vehemently, they have designated the status of Scheduled Tribe in the constitution of free India. Tribes that reside in quite an isolation bestow backwardness in terms of livelihood, having distinctive cultures and customs are put in the category of Scheduled Tribe, and their rights are defined and safeguarded legally. Despite that, the Aborigines face numerous difficulties.

The work is confined to the Garhwal region; thus, further in this paper, tribes that are concentrated in the given area shall be discussed.

Tribes of the Region

The history of tribes holds a parallel with the history of mankind. Several names, such as Girijan, Adivasi, Vanvasi, Janjati, aborigines, etc., identify them. Nadim Hasnain rightly articulates that to understand the history of tribes, we must go back to the distant time when Indus civilization declined, and the Indian subcontinent witnessed the dawn of Aryan culture.¹² We might surmise from the given statement that antiquity also holds various cultural dimensions. Also, one must understand that though many were nomads, they had a solid cultural setup and were affixed to certain be that they sternly followed. In the Indian context, we find traces of tribal origins in almost every part of the country.

The region in focus here was an abode of numerous ancient tribes. Ancient scriptures make mention of Kirat, Kinnar, Yaksh, and Khas tribes, which later assimilated into the Aryan garb. Moreover, the due recognition of tribes in the epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana indicates that their existence in the region goes way back in time.¹³

The culture of Uttarakhand is an admixture of the folk culture of Kol, Bhil, Kirat, Kinnar, Yaksh, Gandharva, Nag, Khas, Huna, Dravida, and Aryan tribes. This uniquecommixture is very much evident in present society as well.¹⁴ Correspondingly, anthropologists and historians have established that states and empires flourished later when the ancient tribes and chiefdoms gave up their non-dependent existence.¹⁵ Thus, weshall discuss the tribal setup of the Garhwal region to understand the societal structure of the progressive population of these times.

According to D.P. Saklani, the tribes of Central Himalayas can be put under two categories; those who entered India from the Northeast via Tibet and thus possessing facial features of the Chinese race and those who came through Himalayan passes and traced their origin from the Aryan race, and then there is a third category of those who areentirely different from the other two categories mentioned above.¹⁶

They are very close to nature, live and subsist in forests, rear animals, and perform seasonal migration.¹⁷ Although a clear distinction is persistent in different tribes, a blood sample study of members of the tribes in Uttarakhand was tested by Dr. Venu Gopal and Dr. Harshvardhan of the Anthropological Survey of India. It was found out that the Tharu, Buksa, Bhotiyas, Jaunari, Jad, and Raji tribes of the state belong to the same race, and their ancestors were probably Buksas.¹⁸ Bhotiya, Bhuksa, and Jaunsari are found in the Garhwal region. Currently, available population data of the tribes present in districts of Garhwal is given below-

Sr. No.	District	Total Population	Male	Female
1.	Uttarkashi	3512	1651	1861
2.	Chamoli	12260	6021	6239
3.	Rudraprayag	386	217	169
4.	Tehri Garhwal	875	459	416
5.	Dehradun	111663	58264	53399
6.	Garhwal	2215	1174	1041

7.	Haridwar	6323	3385	2938
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Table 3.1- Population Data of Scheduled Tribes in Garhwal Division¹⁹

Further discussion about some of the main tribes of Garhwal region is given in the following sub-sections.

II. Bhotiya

The Bhotia tribe is said to be indigenous to the Tibet region, and at different times in the past, they came and settled in various areas of India. Bhotia is a corrupted nomenclature of Bod, a traditional name for Tibetan people. The term got improvised according to the places where they went, for instance, in Jammu and Kashmir, they are called Bot and Botto, in Himachal Pradesh, they are known as Bhots or Bodhs; in West Bengal, they are Bhutia, Sherpa, Toto, etc., and in Uttaranchal, they are called Bhotia.²⁰ These semi-nomadic tribes are mainly confined to the Pithoragarh, Chamoli, and Uttarkashi districts of the Central Himalayas.²¹

They are presumed to be the crossbreed of Khasias and Hunias, but their appearance, manners, and certain other specificities make them strongly associated with Khasias. Their dialect matches that of Tibet.²² The tribe prefers indigenous nomenclature, i.e., Jad, Tolchha, and Marchha. Of them, Marchha is found in the Mana Valley of Chamoli, Tolchha dwells in the Niti Valley of Chamoli, and Jad is in the Nilang and Judang Valleys of Uttarkashi.²³ Rest is indigenous to Kumaon regions. Bhotias of Mana, Niti Valley, Dahuli Valley, Kishangang Valley, and the Marchaas and Tolchas sub-group who dwell in Mana Valley, Vishnuganga Valley, Dhauri Valley supposedly migrated from Tibet, Bhutan, and China. They would have been the descendants of Mon-Kumar Bheel or Kirat.²⁴

They are ethnically separate from the Bhotias of other regions but have been put under the same legitimate tribal name, Bhotia, since 1967.²⁵ Crooke informs us that they usually call themselves Raghuvanshi Rajputs and trace their origin to Bhutwal in Nepal.

Those who reside in the tracts of Almora and Garhwal have their assimilation with the other indigenous people is supposed to have been from a long time.²⁶ They came and settled here as a trading community that established import-export trade between Tibet and the inner regions of India.²⁷ They are considered the descendants of Mongols left in Kumaon by Timur.²⁸ They share mongoloid traits with medium stature and a complexion of medium yellow brown with rosy cheeks and dark brown eyes.^{29,30}

Bhotia mainly rear sheep, mules, cows, bullocks, yak, and jibu. They do not cultivate on a large scale, but whatever little they do, they do it in the Terai region, and there they set up their accommodation in the winter season.³¹ They are usually cattle herders and farmers. They weave wool for blankets, shawls, sweaters, etc. They also deal with trade, including herbal medicines, fragrance-based herb tea, etc.³²

The omnipresence of supernatural entities and dependence on divine mercy has always found a place in the forms of worship of the Bhotiya tribe.³³ It is a blend of the teachings of Buddhism with occult practices derived from the ancient religion of Tibet and its neighboring lands³⁴. Spirit worship and magical belief are still in vogue.

As far as marriage customs are concerned, they are an admixture of primitive cultivators and pastoral communities. Crooke informs that their marriage rituals are Hindu ceremonies alike. As for divorce, there is no form of it, and though a man or woman, if found performing any illegitimate intercourse, maybe outcasted, they can be restored merely by giving a tribal feast.³⁵

Monogamy is a general practice, but polyandry is not restricted as well.³⁶ Earlier, several families lived together and promoted the idea of a joint family, but with change in time, many opted to change the familial setup to a nuclear one.³⁷

Bhotias being patrilineal reserves the right of inheritance for male member usually. The custom of sauntia-bant is prevalent amongst Bhotias, wherein property division occurs as per the number of wives a person has.³⁸

The Bhotia tribe is stratified, meaning the tribe is further divided based on highly differentiated economy, rituals, and customs. Bharet, Shyangmi, and Chhyang are considered elites, whereas Kunkiya, Yami, and Fiwa are the ostracized sub-tribes possessing relatively lower status in the Bhotia community.³⁹

Due to constant communication with the Hindus in the vicinity, Hinduized Bhotias have assimilated various aspects of Hindu customs, for instance, on the fifth day of childbirth, Pancholi is performed, in which the mother and child are kept in a separate room, and no one is permitted to touch them. Upon impurification of the ritual, sprinkling, and tasting of cow urine is observed.⁴⁰ Brahmin perform the Namkaran ceremony on the eleventh day and purify women and children. Likewise, several other ways are performed, like the Hindu customs of sixteen samskaras.

Their traditional costumes reflect a hint of both Bhotia and Tibetan culture. Females of the tribe mainly adorn Honju, which is an upper garment, Chuua, and ghagra are the type of skirts which is worn to cover the lower half body. Married women wear Pangden, a kind of apron that is tied from the waist and goes until the calf.

Males wear Bakhu, which is like Tibetan Chuba but is usually sleeveless to cover the upper half of the body. It is tied to the neck on one side and the waist on the other and is secured with a silk or cotton belt. Chubba is a robe-like cloth and is usually made of wool.⁴¹

Moreover, their carpet weaving craft has gained massive fame in recent years. Every year in winter, the nomadic Bhotias come to Dunda of Uttarkashi district and weave traditional patterns on carpets, and, in summer, they sell them at fairs and markets.⁴² The Dunda weaving Bhotias are also famous for knitting the pashmina shawl, Bhotia Dann, which is a hand-woven rug.⁴³ The designs they incorporate are usually geometric patterns which give the cloth elegance. Also, the Bhotia hand-made blanket, Thulma, traditionally woven by the Shauka sub-tribe of Bhotia, has become quite famous throughout the region.⁴⁴

III. Buksa/ Bhuksa/ Bhoksa

There is no clear evidence of where the Buksa tribe originated, but it is known that the Terai and Bhabar region inhabitants came here from outside.⁴⁵ They mainly inhabit the Dehradun and Pauri Garhwal districts of the Garhwal division. They are often referred to as Mehre or Mehra in Dehradun.⁴⁶ The Buksa tribe is considered the sub-tribe of the Tharu community due to peculiarities in the socio-cultural aspects. Yet, they are presumed to be the lowest clan of the Tharu tribe.⁴⁷

There is no definite consensus on how they got this name, but one view says that their resemblance with the mountain goat 'Bok' due to their long beard earned them the name 'Boksa.' Some Bhoksa believes that the British gave them this name, as they looked down upon them as bogus or useless fellows. With time Bogus termed up into Bhuksa. Yet another view is that the nomenclature comes from the Hindi word Bhusa, which is fodder for animals. The struggle to survive in the rugged Terai region led them to stay on whatever they could get to eat, and thus from there, the derivation of Bhuksa can be perceived.⁴⁸

Many Buksas consider their descent from Khushvanshi Rajputs. There are legends that Buksa and Tharus claim their roots to be from the female counterpart of the royal family. It was believed that the ruler of the Terai region got defeated by the invaders, and the royal ladies took shelter in forests. Chamars and Sais attendants of the royal females accompanied them and eventually intermarried, which gave rise to two separate communities, i.e., Buksa, who were supposedly Sais, and Tharus, who were Chamars.⁴⁹ But, Bhuksas are more advanced than the Tharus because their rituals are more like the Hindus.⁵⁰

Crooke elucidates that they are divided into three sections; Purabi, or Eastern, lies east of Ramganaga as far as Sharda, the Panchami, or Western, dwells in the region between Patli Dun and Bijnor and the section inhabiting further west from Ganga to Yamuna.⁵¹ The Eastern Bhuksas live more of a nomadic life, whereas the Western Bhuksa are inclined towards a settled yet simple life.⁵² Bhuksas have fifteen different clans, out of which, Badgujar, Taabri, Barhanai, Jalwar, Adhoi, Dugugia, Rathor, Negauris, Jalal, Upadhya, Chauhan, and Dunwaria are the superior ones. In contrast, Dimar Rathor, Dhangra, and Goli are considered lower in status.⁵³

They conform to Hindu customs that suit them and are non-complex. They claim to be Hindus and thus follow similar traditions and rituals. Most of the populace worships Mahashiva, but the worship of Satyanarayana, Jwala Devi of Kashipur, Sitla Devi, Gauriji, and Kalkiji is also prominent. Dhane Deota, who inhabits the forest and has no form or shape, is also worshiped by them.⁵⁴ They also believe in sorcery and witchcraft. Locals believe that some Bhuksa sorcerers can even transform themselves into some animal form to accomplish the destruction of their enemies.⁵⁵

They speak Buxari dialect, and most of their folk songs are in the same dialect.⁵⁶ Rowrie Horatio Bickerstaffe informs us that their food is simple: wheat bread, milk, millet, dal, and rice. Due to indolence, they do not hunt, nor do they breed domestic animals, thus, they only obtain yarn and berries from the forest.⁵⁷

The community is patrilineal, wherein sons get an equal share, but the widow also receives a percentage of the property.⁵⁸ Widow remarriage is also acceptable in the community. Women are treated with high repute.⁵⁹ The higher gotra Buksas usually do not intermarry with the lower ones.⁶⁰

Dress and Ornaments- The males' clothing is quite like that of the surrounding region. Women usually wear lehnga, kameez, or jampar and cover their heads and shoulders with an Orani.⁶¹ Bhuksa women are fond of wearing ornaments, such as Pakra on the ears, Nathani or Phulki on the nose, Hansli and Kharwa on the neck, Vachak and Khela on the arms, and so on.⁶²

The community makes extensive use of medicinal herbs to cure illnesses. For instance, Methi seeds are used to heal oneself from the scorching heat and cure toothache, the bark of the bhimal stem is used to cure hair loss.⁶³

IV. Jaunsari

Jaunsari tribe resides in Chakrata, Kalsi, and Tyuni in Dehradun. Socially, they are divided based on two regions i.e.: the lower region, Jaunsar, and the upper part Bawar.⁶⁴ They trace their lineage to Khasa tribes. The language spoken here is termed Western Pahari by Grierson; in his work, 'Linguistic Survey of India,' he concluded that the Aryan people of the past had quite similarities with the language of the Khasas.⁶⁵

The above statement might add to another fact that there was a progeny of ancient Khasas. Mahabharata mentions Khasas presenting heaps of gold to Yudishthira at his coronation ceremony.⁶⁶ They appeared to have joined Duryodhyana's army and fought with swords, lances, and stones against Satyaki.⁶⁷ They are described in Markandeya Purana as the 'Parvatsraniyah' or those who reside in the mountains. Mahabharata has described them as a rude, half-civilized tribe along with Sakas, Daradas, etc. Traditionally, they are Rajputs with tall, fair stature and well-defined facial features. The anthropometrical similarity with the Aryan tribe makes them their progeny.⁶⁸ About Jaunsari, the following words are necessary to be reiterated:

*"The abstinence from milk enjoined by Mahasu connects the Jaunsaris with the people of the Indus valley to the present day and with the old Kators of the Chitral: the later of whom the same authority on somewhat slender evidence identifies with Katyuris of the Almora district."*⁶⁹

Whatever the uncertainties about relations between Katyuris and Jaunsari is, there is one thing one can be sure enough their antiquity is undoubtedly from ancient times, and this can be affirmed by their due mention in the epic of Mahabharata. Grierson also accepts the antiquity of the Khasas of Himalayan districts and remarks that the lower Himalayas from Kashmir to Darjeeling have been home to the ancient khasa tribe of the Mahabharata.⁷⁰

Moreover, lord Mahasu, a local deity, also finds pertinent mention in the ancient epic. The Jaunsari tribal masses are majorly devotees of Mahasu, i.e., the cult of Mahasiva. The principal seat of Mahasu devta is located at Hanol in Bawar region.⁷¹ There is a saying that God Mahasu and his subordinates, Chalda, Kukurse, Silgur, Puneshar, Kali, Beejat, Koilu, and Sharda, protect this region from all sides.⁷² Masses call god down on earth with the aid of dance and music. Mahasu, the local deity, finds mention in Mahabharata also. It is said that Duryodhana came to Hanol and liked the place so dearly that he decided to stay there. Later, he prayed to lord Mahasu and made him the king of this region. Duryodhana made Jakholi his capital and constructed a temple here for lord Mahasu.⁷³

They consider themselves Hindus, yet their customs differ from mainstream Hinduism. The birth of a female is a matter of rejoicing for them.⁷⁴ Women are an economic asset mainly for two reasons; 1. the family gets the bride price, 2. They join shoulder to shoulder with men and put in equal labor in the field.⁷⁵ Animal sacrifice is common, and various Hindu gods have been metamorphosized per the community customs.⁷⁶

Communion usually takes place at an early age for both boy and girl, but with the change in time, this has changed, and parents marry off their kids as per the legal age. Divorce is something unusual in this society. Exogamy is quite prevalent.⁷⁷ As per tradition, women can marry seven times. societal rules are relatively liberal for Jaunsari women. For instance, a widow can live life freely, or if she wishes to marry after her husband's death, she can do willfully.⁷⁸ There are two types of Jaunsari women in the society, i.e., 'Rayanti,' married women and is well-respected by all, and 'Dhyanti,' are unmarried girls unmarried, they well-respected as well.⁷⁹

What is more interesting is that they find their lineages from Pandavas, who married Draupadi, the only wife of 5 brothers. Thus, polyandry and polygamy are yet prevalent among them.⁸⁰ In polyandry, it is standard that the eldest brother marries, and all the other brothers inevitably become women's husbands. The oldest brother can keep more than one wife, for it is the eldest brother every time, and other brothers share the women.⁸¹ They call it "Pandav Pratha," which means 'the tradition of Pandavas.'⁸²

Regarding the prevalence of Polyandry in the region, D.N. Majumdar informs us that a geo-economic cause lies behind this marital system. The hardship and volume of work need several hands; thus, this kind of system can be well-equipped in the region with such adversities. However, he informs that the local people believe that polyandry is necessary because the land holdings are tiny, and thus, it becomes a pre-requisite for securing the family property.⁸³

Magh festival and Besoo fair are the two most important events amongst Janusaris. Magh festival is celebrated in winter, whereas the Besoo fair is held in spring, where several men and women gather wearing gray colors and celebrate the onset of spring with dance and music. Other festivals the people celebrate are Jagra, Man, Lonai, Panchon, Diwali, etc.⁸⁴ Their fairs, festivals, and folk culture represent social and natural milieu, which aptly shows the longing for natural resources in the vicinity.⁸⁵

Jaunsaris strongly believes in the existence of dankans, "women with the evil eye," which can harm any object they desire. It is said that to avoid the evil eye of dankan, Jaunsaris used to wear dirty and rugged clothes.⁸⁶

They have the institution of 'Khumri,' which acts as a mediator for resolving individual conflicts. Every member of the community takes part in it.⁸⁷ This agency had parallels with ancient samiti, where ordinary folks could participate.

Their traditional dresses distinguish them from other tribes. The male usually wears Chudidar pants, Close neck coat, and a woolen cap. On the other hand, women wear Lehenga or a long skirt, Kurta on top, and adorn a handkerchief-type cloth on their head. In winter, men wear woolen coats along with a cap or headgear made of Goat or sheep's wool, and they cover their lower body with woolen pants locally known as Jhangoli. They also wear shoes made of wooden bark, locally known as 'Aal.'⁸⁸

Commonalities Among the Tribes of Garhwal

Due to the paucity of resources and rugged terrains, the tribes often encounter each other and thus share several customs that, one way or the other, establish a similarity between all of them. Some of the commonalities are delineated below-

Reverence to the Force of Nature- due to impassable terrains and adverse climate, these tribes revere the power of nature. For instance, Bhotiyas worship Kailash mountains, Dhonagiri, Hathi mountain, and Nanda Devi mountains, they house Ghadiyal Devata in high mountains. the deity, in return, protects their cattle from wild beasts.⁸⁹ Dhane Deota of Buksa is said to have dwelled in the forest. It is also said that he does not have any material form. Whenever tribes go on a hunt, they offer the deity a part of the hunt. Along with that, they also worship God for providing adequate forest produce for their sustenance.⁹⁰

Jaunsari's festival of Dubaddi is celebrated with the worship of grass, known as dub, and the Nunai festival is the annual festival in honor of Shilgur, the god of sheep.⁹¹

Ethnomedical Knowledge- due to primitiveness and relative isolation from the outside world, the tribes explored the surrounding resources. They derived various sources of sustenance from nature and learned to cure common occurring diseases using medicinal herbs in their environment.

In their research paper, Vaishali Chandola and Anant Ram Nautiyal elaborate on Bhotiya's extensive knowledge of medicinal plants. In their micro-study of the Bhotiya's residing in the Chhinka village of Chamoli districts, they determined 34 plant species that the tribal people use to cure various diseases. Chiraita, for instance, is used to cure diabetes, Harad is a type of fruit that is dried and then taken to heal digestive issues. Likewise, the roots and leaves of Tagar are used to cure severe headaches.⁹² Another study on this tribe reflects that 91 percent of the tribals prefer homemade herbal medicines to modern ones. Also, the relative distance from the cities and towns and the unavailability of modern medical facilities in the vicinity make them more relying on readily available plant medicines.⁹³

In a study on Tharu and Buksa tribes, it was found that 37 plant species are used by the tribe for skin-related diseases, for instance, the leaf of Adhrar is mixed with ghee to cure deep cuts and wounds, the leaf paste of Sarso is used for the dog bite, Bhamtada herb is put on the deep cuts and wounds to stop bleeding, likewise, Alsi is used to as a medicine to treat boils.⁹⁴

Likewise, a seminal work shows the effective use of 58 ethnobotanical plants by the Jaunsari tribe. Jaunsaris prepare paste, powders, infusions, and concoction to cure ailments. Uwang root paste, for instance, is given orally to cure malarial fever, Dudhia Mohora root is turned into powder and mixed with wheat, is generally consumed by women in their lactation period, and powdered seeds of kahwa are given in case of constipation.⁹⁵

Belief in Myths, Superstitions, and Witchcraft- Due to lack of contact and communication with the mainstream culture and because of awareness and education, the tribal culture still abodes various myths, superstitions, and sorcery, and a firm belief of the tribal people from a long time, making them a part of present tribal society as well. Take the example of the Jaunsari tribe, where witchcraft was so prevalent that in ancient times, women were burnt on the pretext of performing witchcraft, now, we don't see such instances, yet it reflects their belief system.⁹⁶ Animal sacrifice is yet prevalent in this community.⁹⁷

It is a myth that those who die suddenly are being cursed, and it is locally known as 'Vish', those who summon it can use it for matters. Rag or Dak is another myth believed to be like a supernatural power, and those who have it can kill anyone as per their will.⁹⁸ The dominance of Puchher as a priest amongst Bhotiyas shows their inquisitiveness toward the mystics. According to them, Puchher acts as the messenger of God, who possesses the power to cure any disease.⁹⁹ Magico-religious healers of Buksas, known as Bhagats, perform the same job in the community.¹⁰⁰

Liquor is forbidden, but marijuana and hash are taken on the pretext that it is believed to be taken by lord Shiva as well. Bhotiyas observe several types of worship to cast off evil, and animal sacrifice is quite prevalent in both Bhotiya¹⁰¹ and Buksa tribes.¹⁰²

Moreover, using black and white magic to bless agriculture and cattle is quite a common custom in Buksa tribal community.¹⁰³

Primitive Method of Living- Due to inter-mixture with the people of mainstream society, the tribal way of living has changed, yet to some extent, we can surmise that those engaged in traditional life have managed to maintain their traditional way of living. For instance, many Bhotias are still involved in conventional trading activities and journey from the highlands of Tibet to the lowlands of Garhwal, trading with their traditional woolen hand-woven goods.

Take another instance of the Jaunsari tribe, among whom polyandry was customary. Now also, the

tribe is not unaware of this marriage ritual, and many still believe and practice it.¹⁰⁴

V. Conclusion-

Garhwal is a small region nestled amidst the towering Himalayan mountains. While it is not extensively documented in India's historical records, ancient Hindu scriptures do make references to this land. Due to the scarcity of historical writings based on evidence, scholars tend to consider it relatively newly populated.

Nevertheless, the enduring presence of tribes in this region, maintaining a lifestyle similar to their ancestors with primitive economic and cultural setups, serves as a testament to its historical past. Their rich ethno-botanical history is predominantly preserved in oral traditions. It is crucial to document this uniqueness to safeguard the region's culture.

The younger generation of these tribes is increasingly migrating to the plains of India, resulting in a loss of ancestral knowledge about the region's herbs. Moreover, the diminishing presence of cultural institutions due to this migration is a significant loss for the region.

Therefore, this paper endeavors to introduce the world to the local culture of Garhwal, encouraging more research into it. It aims to inspire young people within these tribal communities to take active steps in preserving their own culture.

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