

The Raji: A Particularly vulnerable tribal group of Uttarakhand

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Introduction

Raji is little known community that was brought to light for the first time in 1823 by the commissioner of Kumaun, C .W. Traill. The Raji also referred to as Ban Rawat, Ban Raji or Ban Manus are very small tribes of Kumaon hill, in the past were cave-dwellers and nomadic hunter-gatherers. Within Kumaon, they are more popularly called Ban Rawat, which literally means 'King of the Forest'. It is said that the Raji or Banrawats are descendant of the prehistoric Kiratas, who were comparatively earlier settlers of the region than the Nagas or the Khasas. Atkinson (1882) said that these early tribes entered India by the same route as the Aryans and the Kiratas were the first of these others to arrive.

Kiratas were gradually uprooted from the region by the dominating impact of other ethnic groups, but their few descendants remained in Kumaun and Nepal. A few decades ago they lived a life typical of the Neolithic age, as cave dwellers and food gatherers- subsisting on hunting, fishing and jungle produce. A few years back they are one of the very few tribal community still inhabiting caves and rock shelters. (Bora.H.S, 1988) Another early explanation point out that the Raji have descended from the servant of the Raja of Kutpur, by whom they were expelled for some fault. Since then they have been wandering about in the hills and forest, living on jungle produce. Atkinson. E. T, 1884.

By nature they are very shy and aloof. Previously they used to carve and trade wooden bowls and boxes for grain, cloth etc. with surrounding sedentary Kumauni villagers. But conditions have changed in the last several decades and Raji have given up silent trade. Now they work as laborers, practice agriculture or raise livestock. The enormous pressure of Hinduization, together with pressure to lead a sedentary life, has immensely affected their way of living, but one thing is clear, they still avoid socialization with neighbouring Kumauni females.

The Raji are confined to Pithoragarh district and are also found in contiguous area of south-west Nepal across river Kali. In India the Raji are distributed in ten villages only viz, Kimkhola, Bhagtirua, Ganagoan, Chiphalthara, Kantoli, Kuta Chaurani, Madanpuri, Altari, Jamtari and Khirdwari.(Singh KS, 1994).

Population of Raji from different Sources

Sl.No	Name of Tribe	Population	Sources
1	Raji	517	2001 census
2		679	2003-04, Base Line Survey report
3		680	2011 Census

On November 9, 2000, the state of Uttaranchal-the 27th state of India-was carved out of Uttar Pradesh; in January 2007 the new state changed its name to Uttarakhand, meaning “northern region,” which was the traditional name for the area. Uttarakhand is a region of outstanding natural beauty. Most of the northern parts of the state are part of Greater Himalaya ranges, covered by the high Himalaya peaks and glaciers, while the lower foothills were densely forested till denuded by British log merchants and forest contractors after independence. Uttarakhand is comprised of two regions, the western half known as Garhwal and the eastern region going by the name of Kumaon the two having different chieftains in history and different lingual and cultural influences due to proximity and neighborhoods of different cultures. Mohanty, P.K. (2006). The tribal population of Uttarakhand is concentrated in the remote and forest areas of Tarai and Bhabar and high reaches of Pithoragarh, Chamoli, Uttarkashi districts and Jaunsar-Bhabar area of Dehradun district. Some are of Mongoloid origin and have a nomadic or seminomadic way of life. However, now - a - days, most of these people have taken to a settled life and are engaged in animal husbandry, agriculture, trade and other occupations. Mohanty, P.K. (2006). The total population of Uttarakhand in 2001 Census has been 8,489,349. Of these, 256,129 persons are Scheduled Tribes which constitutes 3 per cent of the total population of the state. The Uttarakhand state contributes only 0.83 percent to total and 0.3 to the tribal population of India. The state has registered 20.9 per cent decadal growth of scheduled tribe population in 1991-2001. There are total of five notified scheduled tribes in the state, and all of them have been enumerated in 2001 Census. These are: Tharu, Jaunsari, Buksa, Bhotia and Raji. According to 2011 census, total population of Raji in Uttarakhand is 680 in which 87% are in rural and 13% are in urban.

Tribal Groups in Uttarakhand

S.No.	Name of the Tribe	Districts
1	Tharu	Udham Singh Nagar, Nainital, Pauri and Dehradun.
2	Jaunsari	Dehradun, Uttarkashi and Tehri.
3	Buksa	Dehradun, Nainital, Udham Singh Nagar, Pauri and Hardwar.
4	Bhotia	Almora, Chamoli, Pithoragarh, Bageshwar and Uttarkashi
5	Raji	Pithoragarh and Champawat

Distribution of Raji population in different villages

Sl. No.	Name of Districts	Blocks	Name of the villages	No of families	Total Populaion	Males	Female s
1	Pithoragarh	Dharchula	Kimkhola (Ratura)	34	144	79	65
2			Bhagtirwa	9	36	17	19
3			Ganagaon	16	67	33	34
4			Chipalthara	10	37	25	12
5		Kanalichhin a	Jamtadi	20	78	42	36
6			Altadi	15	65	38	27
7		Didihat	Madanpuri	10	39	19	20
8			Kutachaurani	19	75	40	35
9			Katula	3	15	06	09
10		Champavat	Champavat	Khiradwari	28	123	72
Total				164	679	374	305

Source: Base Line survey report conducted in 2003- 04.

Uttarakhand State, a district consisting of eight mountains in the Central Himalayan region, is the abode of the Raji, which is socially and economically the most underdeveloped tribal community of the Uttarakhand. The Raji are in a transitional stage between hunter-gatherer and a pre-agricultural economy. If the shift from food gathering to food production, wandering to sedentary, while remaining resistant to external influence, is called a transition, then this is incomplete in their case and likely to persist for a some time to come. In earlier days Raji were dependent on hunter-gathering. In the post-independence era since 1948, the economy of the Raji has undergone several changes due to resettlement, dairy farming, agriculture, etc. At present, most of the male members work as laborers (but not throughout the year) and the females keep themselves busy cutting firewood and grass and selling these in the nearest markets, as well as gathering food and hunting. The long-established habit wandering has only relatively recently been replaced by a more settled life style, and this move has not been entirely successful in inspiring the creation of an organized community. A substantial number of Raji still follow a nomadic lifestyle due to economic and marital habits, a primitive mindset, and cultural belief. The Raji speak a dialect of their own which they call Rajbar Bhasa. The Raji's social organization is based on both kinship and territorial

principles. The traditional hunter-gatherer economy is practiced by 40% of the males and 78% of the females; rest of the tribe's livelihood comes from wage labour in agriculture/fishery and carpentry. The nuclear family dominates Raji society, who calls themselves Hindu by religion.

Primary Occupation in the visited villages

Sl. No.	Name of the Villages	Primary Occupation
1	Kimkhola (Ratyura)	Wood collection and quarrying
2	Bhagtirwa	
3	Ganagaon	Wood collection and agriculture
4	Chipalthara	Labour and wood collection
5	Jamtadi	Agriculture and labour
6	Altadi	

The Raji may be appropriately designated as a "per-literate" people. There was complete black-out of literacy during hunting-gathering stage of the tribe. Only recently after the establishment of Primary school in four Raji villages, the tribe is set at the initiation phase of education. Very few adults are literate and the spread of literacy is mainly restricted to the younger generation below the age of 15 years. There is only one girl and one boy of two villages who are studying in intermediate and Matriculation respectively. In the whole Raji society there educational level is highest at present. Traditional nomadic hunting-gathering life style can be singled out as one most powerful causative factor behind the widespread illiteracy of the tribe. The habitual unwillingness of these shy people to come in contact with other people was another crucial region. Being in almost total isolation and completely aloof from the world beyond their own they were least aware of the utility of education. However, implementation of the Raji settlement scheme by the Government, NGOs have initiated for improvement of education level of this tribal community.

Tribe wise Literacy Rates of Uttarakhand

Sl. No.	Name of Tribe	Literacy Rate (7 years and above)		
		Total	Male	Female
1	Bhotia	79.9	79.9	69.1
2	Buksa	49.9	66.0	32.4
3	Jaunsari	58.9	71.7	4.8
4	Raji	35.8	47.2	22.5
5	Tharu	67.0	80.4	53.1
	Total	63.2	76.4	49.4

Source: Office of the Registrar General, Govt. of India, 2001.

This cultural context may range from simple food habits to a complex traditional practices and 'health culture' that people practice. Health culture of a community is referred to as the 'cultural factors influencing the health of a community, cultural meaning of health problems, diffusion of health practices from outside, cultural innovations by the current generations to deal more effectively with health problems and the overall health-related behaviour of the community' If understanding of such health culture of the people are neglected intervention at the community levels will not be effective. There is also a variation in the health issues among the tribals related to their nutritional intake that is influenced by socio-economic, socio-cultural and ecological setting. Often health issues related to lack of iodine that cause goitre and mental retardedness is found among the tribals especially living in the hilly, terrainous and forest areas. The Raji people are come under under-nutrition category. And they are suffering from respiratory disease, joint pain and skin disease mainly.

Like other tribal people Raji have also lots of problem like health, education, social, economic and so many other problems. The tribal society have developed strong magico-religious health care system and they wish to survive live in their own homogenous and culturally firm system wherein common belief, customs and practices connected with health and disease have been found to be intimately connected with the treatment of disease. It is necessary for health functionaries not only have knowledge about the culture and society of the people and the socio-cultural dimensions of their health and family welfare systems, but also to examine constrains for the acceptance of modern health care facilities. Like these Raji have also suffering from the above mentioned culture and believes.

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