GUJJARS’ POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND IDENTITY POLITICS

‘Gujjars, as one of the most ancient communities of the country which has dominated north Indian political scene for centuries are again getting an opportunity to play a historic role, at any rate, in Jammu and Kashmir State as a bridge between its regions and communities’

-Balraj Puri

Taking part in politics is political participation. The general level of participation in a society is the extent to which the people as a whole are active in politics: the number of active people multiplied by the amount of their action, to put it arithmetically. But the question of what it is to take part in politics is massively complex and ultimately ambiguous. It raises the question of what constitutes politics. We would, for example, assume that activity within a political party or an organization which regarded itself as a pressure group should count as political participation. Although not overtly political, these organizations set the context of politics, give their active members administrative experience and are capable of overt political action if their interests or principles are threatened. There is an opposite problem about political losers: if people act, but ineffectively, perhaps because they are part of a permanent minority in a political system, can we say they have participated in the making of decisions? One implication of this doubt is that possessing power is a necessary condition or logical equivalent of true political participation. If one is merely consulted by a powerful person who wants one's views for information, or if one is mobilized or re-educated within the control of another, one has not participated in politics in any significant sense.

— Lincoln Allison
Aristotle defined ‘Politics’ as ‘the science of state’. It corresponds to that part of the affairs of the State which centers in Government and that kind or part of Government which speaks to law. The word Politics is derived from Greek word ‘polis’ meaning small city-states. Polis has been translated as city-states. So, Politics means getting knowledge of city-states (Rathod, 2005).

“Politics is an art of governing the mankind by deceiving them”.

-- Prof. Johnson.

“Politics is the striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power either among States or among groups within a State”.

-- Max Weber.

This chapter deals with the political participation, political empowerment and political assertion of the settled Gujjars of Jammu. In this chapter an attempt has been made to elaborate the specific demands and political aspirations of a community that is trying to protect and promote its culture and distinct identity. The present work has also made a preliminary attempt to understand and conceptualize ‘Identity Politics’ with a view to develop a framework and perspective for locating the identity politics of Gujjars of Jammu.

Political participation is the participation of the ruler and the ruled in the political life. It is conditioned by psychological, political and social variables. These social variables differ in different countries. Political participation legitimizes political power. It is an essential means of making elite rule acceptable to modern society as well as in different societies. Political participation results in greater stability of political culture and political system (Ibid., 2005).

Political participation is a necessary ingredient of every political system. Although political power in every society is monopolized by just a few the incumbent of political authority in every system is found to be quite keen on ensuring some amount of political participation by the people. The reason is quite understandable. By involving the many in the matters of the State, political participation fosters stability and order by reinforcing the legitimacy of political authority. A society in which a substantial part of the population is denied any participation whatsoever is likely to be highly explosive. This is why even in modern non-democratic political systems the idea of political
participation seems to be well-nurtured. A modern fascist or a modern dictator, notwithstanding whatever power he is free to exercise, will certainly not try to follow a go-it-alone policy; instead, he will invariably try to cloak his arbitrary decisions with the veil of a mass approval secured through some form of political participation by the people. The idea of this participation, naturally, assumes greater importance in a democratic system which, indeed, demands it. After all, participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled (Ralhan and Lambat, 2006).

**Political Participation of the Gujjar:**

Political participation of the Gujjar community is the most significant aspect of empowerment. In a democratic set up, it is the responsibility of the State to have special care of the expectations and expressions of each social group. Following these ideals, the Indian Constitution under the provision of Articles 330 and 332 provides political reservation of seats in Parliament and State Legislature for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. All the States of Indian Union have such provisions according to the population of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which figured 46 Parliament seats and 529 Assembly seats respectively except Jammu and Kashmir State.

There is no reservation either in the Lok Sabha or the State Assembly available to Gujjars. The Gujjar community claims that it shows complete ignorance of the Government of the State or a conscious effort of some dominant section of society to maintain status quo. Perhaps it is the only State which has not followed this significant policy of political reservation of seats. According to a local survey, Gujjar electorates are dominant in 26 Assembly constituencies. The census of India 2001 data show that tribes are distributed all over the twenty-two districts of Jammu and Kashmir State. Kargil and Ladakh have more than 80 percent concentration of tribal population. Such tribal policy is widening social inequality among tribes and dominant section of the State and such discrimination also creates alienation among the deprived groups. As a reaction to this, some social and political associations are emerging in the State and playing a significant role of awareness campaign of their political rights in their community such as ‘Gujjar United Front’ (Kumar, 2007).
The former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Lt. General S.K. Sinha (Retd.) in one of his public speeches at Rajouri made out strong case for the empowerment of Gujar community. Having been in touch with the ground realities in Jammu and Kashmir during his period of tenure i.e. 2003-2008, he made out that there is no dimension of social and economic existence in Jammu and Kashmir of which the Governor is not authentically informed. He gave his arguments that the Gujar community has been facing the hardships and persistently suffering in the aftermath of partition and as a consequence of more than decade long militancy in the State.

Besides pointing out that the entire community is in need of being socio-economically uplifted, he stressed for the empowerment of the community which he firmly believed will usher in an era of peace and prosperity among them. Other issues which need attention are well conceptualized polities and programmes aimed at the alleviation of illiteracy, backwardness and rampant poverty in the community which have prevented the Gujar community from making progress at par with other social segment of pluralistic society.

In the post independence period, Gujjars too had dreamt of a bright and prosperous future. They had hoped that post independence period will definitely see an end to their poverty and backwardness. They were sure that their unparalleled sacrifices during the freedom movement made by their community members will be a big plus point for them and it would carry due weightage with the Constitution makers and the powers which were to take over the reigns of administration in post independence era. They had envisaged that special constitutional provision will be made for them and special plans and programmes for their speedy upliftment will be launched.

Gujjars are of the view that their present day sufferings are due to various reasons; the most important amongst them is the lack of adequate representation in the democratic institutions. They assert that they do not have sufficient representation in different institutions of the government. They even assert that their problems have not been forcefully voiced and attracted greater attention of the rulers as of the senior authorities. The authorities have not implemented the decisions of the highest level democratic institution seriously and earnestly (Editorial, Awaz-e-Gurjar, 2006).
Various campaigns were launched by Gujjar community to highlight its demands. Political reservations topped amongst the long list of these demands. The Gujjars agitated for this demand in various conferences, seminars, press meet and also in the meetings they had with the persons in power from time to time. Every time they were assured of sympathetic consideration of their socio-economic and political demands by the Government. Gujjars say that they relied upon the assurances of the Government only. They were aware of the view that it is only a matter of days that assurances will be implemented and their cherished dream would be fulfilled. But the assurances were never implemented.

Gujjar leaders have from time to time made it clear that political reservation is a pre-requisite for their overall educational and economic development. The Government should accept this demand in the right earnest, they added; installation of a popular Government in the State in 1996, after decade’s long turmoil in the State, again generated new hopes amongst the Gujjars. They had many meetings with the political leaders and pleaded forcefully their long pending demands of declaring political reservations for them. As in the post Assembly elections they were again assured of the sympathetic consideration of their demands. But even during the six year period 1996-2002 political reservation remained only a dream for Gujjars. In late 2002, when a new government was formed in Jammu and Kashmir State, the Gujjars again decided to meet the leaders of coalition partner to impress the urgency of declaring political reservation for them (Ibid., 2006).

Problems of Gujjars and their remedial measures were raised in seminar on ethnocultural heritage of nomadic and semi-nomadic Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir held on May 10, 1999, at the University of Jammu, New Campus. In the seminar, the participants unanimously resolved that political representation for the Gujjars is necessary.

The seminar expressed deep satisfaction at the overwhelming participation of more than eight hundred Gujjars representations, writers and social activists coming from as far-flung areas like Bandipora, Kupwara, Anantnag, Poonch, Rajouri, Akhnoor, Bari Brahmana and Jammu in the State of Jammu and Kashmir and equally enthusiastic participation of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh Gujjar representatives from Himachal Pradesh,
Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The seminar provided a unique opportunity of direct interaction between the anthropologists, area specialists, linguists and development experts from University of Jammu, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; National Museum of Mankind, Bhopal; Central Institute of India Languages, Mysore; Maulana Azad Institute of Asian Studies and Culture on the one hand and the representative of Gujjars’ Tribal and Bakerwal community on the other (Warikoo and Som, 2000).

It was resolved that a systematic and organized effort be made to record, research, document and preserve permanently the rich system and sub-system of knowledge and creative skills that are based on thousands of years of experience and creative genius of the tribal Gujjars’ community covering all aspects of their life, environment, herding activities, folk medicine oral history, folklore, language and literature.

In order to give an impetus to the study of Gojri language, literature and culture, it proposed that Gojri department be set up both in the University of Kashmir, Srinagar and University of Jammu.

It was proposed to the Jammu and Kashmir State’s department of information to start a periodical in Gojri language as is being already done in case of Kashmiri and Dogri.

**Gujjar Assertion and State Polity:**

During the Dogra period, the Gujjars were by and large relegated to the background from the political arena in Jammu and Kashmir. However, prominent leaders among Gujjars like Ch. Ghulam Hussain Larsanvi, Mian Nizam Din Larvi, Haji Mohd. Israel Khatana, Ch. Buland Khan Rasom and others were quite active at the socio-political level. However, Maharaja Hari Singh inducted a few Gujjars in the State Assembly then known as Praja Sabha. A few Gujjars were even recruited in the Maharaja’s army and two of them Ch. Khuda Baksh and Ch. Bali Mohammed rose to the rank of Brigadier and Colonel in the State Army respectively (Ibid., 2000).
The Gujjars are largely economically backward, yet with the attainment of independence in 1947 and after partition, they laboured hard to raise their standard of living. Gujjars started organizing themselves in order to raise their voice, to get more and more facilities.

Meanwhile, a Gujjar-Jat conference was formed in 1948. It had its affiliation neither to National Conference nor with Congress or any other political party. Actually it was a non-political organization and people were closely associated with Maharaja Hari Singh. With Sheikh Abdulla’s induction in the political arena of Kashmir, Gujjars largely supported the National Conference.

However, Gujjars remained unorganized until 1955 when a new organization “All Jammu and Kashmir Gujjar Islahi Sudhar Sabha” was formed under the Presidentship of Haji Mohammed Israil. In order to highlight their problems, the Sabha started a weekly-entitled “Nawa-i-Kaum” which was edited by Shri Fateh Ali Sarwarn. It was published from Jammu.

A number of organizations were established during 1950-1960. All India Gujjar Sudhar Sabha was established in 1950. A Branch of this organization was established in Jammu and Kashmir under the Presidentship of Ch. Gulzar Ahmed. This organization functioned from 1960-71. In the beginning, this organization had no affiliation with any political party but later on it got affiliated to the Congress.

A parallel organization to All India Sudhar Sabha was formed known as Gujjar Islahi Conference under the patronage of Mr. G.M Sadiq. Its important leaders were Abdul Nabi Bhagsi and Karam Din Chopra. Another organization of the Gujjar’s was the Gujjar Youth Federation, which mostly consisted of new educated youth. All these organizations from time to time raised some basic issues relating to their community.

In 1962, All India Gujjar Maha Sabha under the Presidentship of Mohammed Shafi M.L.C (J&K) convened a conference at Srinagar. About 3000, delegates participated in the conference where as fifty delegates from each of the States i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Gujarath, Rajasthan attended the conference. A number of resolutions were
passed demanding proportional representation in the legislative Assembly and that “their ratio should be increased in the present Assembly” (Ibid. 2000). From time to time conventions used to be held in order to highlight Gujjars’ problems and pressurize the Government for their acceptance.

A Gujar Convention was held at Jammu in the year 1998 where it was demanded that Gujars should be recruited in large number in Defence Services and Border Security Forces. It was also resolved that Gujars should be given representation proportionate to their population in service, scholarships for education, loans and Legislative Assembly etc. Gojri Language should be recognized on Radio, in Cultural Academy and separate colonies should be set up for the Gujjars.

Similarly a Gujar conference was held at Rajouri in the year 1998 under the Presidentship of Mr. Gulzar Ahmed, a former MLC, where it was resolved that there should be recognition of status and rights of Gujars, the third largest community in the State. The conference demanded the inclusion of Gujjars in the list of Scheduled Tribes and reservation for them in services. It also urged recognition of Gojri in the Indian Constitution. With the introduction of free education in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, many Gujjars got educated and slowly started getting into politics and administration (Ibid. 2000).

Gujjars have taken a substantial step by founding ‘Gujjar Desh Charitable Trust’ at Jammu. It was established on July 17, 1992. The Trust is working not only as a hub for their socio-cultural activities, but it is also catering to their political aspirations. On the one hand, the trust has established a modern school in the memory of Brigadier Khuda Baksh, a well-established Library, and a Gojri Research Institute within its premises. On the other hand, it has been seeking to put pressure on the authorities in both New Delhi and Srinagar to consider their rational demands.

The resulting imbalance in the level of development among Gujjars has always been attracting the attention of Government for some time. It was during the Fifth Five Year Plan that the Government of Jammu and Kashmir for the balanced development of
this community has paid considerable attention and a Sub-plan was especially formulated for the enlistment and betterment of the Gujjars.

The Gujjars also have their representation in the State Legislative Assembly. There are six districts across Jammu and Kashmir, where the Gujjars constitute a substantial chunk of population. There are 23 Assembly Constituencies (8 in Jammu region and 15 in Kashmir) and two Parliamentary Constituencies (One in Kashmir-Baramulla and one in Jammu Poonch) where the Gujjars play a decisive role during elections. In a number of these assembly constituencies, the Gujjars form a majority.

The Gujjars also have their representation in the State Civil Secretariat. They have a nominal representation in the vital State Public Service Commission and the State Subordinate Selection and Recruitment Board, which fill all the gazetted and non-gazetted positions. There are only two Gujjars out of more than 30 members of these recruitment agencies.

Similarly, they have their representation in the Judiciary. There is one District and session Judge and one Munsif out of approximately 50 District and sessions Judges and 200 Munsifs, respectively. So is their representation in the forest, horticulture, sericulture, agriculture, irrigation, public health engineering, electric, education, excise and other departments as well as the 12 State corporations, local-self governing institutions like District Boards and Municipalities, corporate sector units and Banks. The total number of Gujjars holding somewhat high positions in these departments, corporations and other economic institutions is a paltry 10.

Had educational programmes been prioritized for them there would have been appreciable improvement in their educational advancement and in their economic conditions and they would have been able to avail most of the benefits and incentives available to them because of Scheduled Tribe status.

However, the Gujjar identity was promoted through culture, music, literature and art, through radio programmes and the State’s Cultural Academy. Gojri broadcasts over the radio station at Jammu were started in 1975, and extended to Kathua in 1993 and
Poonch in 1994. In order to boost the morale of Gojri speakers and writers, a fortnightly programme on Doordarshan was started in 1994.

In addition, some private institutions and organizations including *Anjuman Tarq Gojri Adab district level branches, Adabi Sangal Kashmir, Indera Adhiyat, and Gojri Adabi Board* besides dramatic and cultural clubs were involved in promoting Gojri language and literature. Gojri journals and magazines such as *Al Insan, Nawa-i-Quom, Gujjar Desh* and *Gujjar Goonj*, published from Jammu, not only enriched their literature but it focused on political and economic issues effecting the community.

The Gojri section of the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages started in 1987 also played an important role by preserving Gojri folklore, giving recognition and support to Gojri writers. It also published a comprehensive Gojri dictionary and *Sheraza*, a quarterly, with poems, songs, short stories and research articles on the Gujjars.

The Gujjars, however, achieved a major breakthrough on April 19, 1991, when the President of India at the instance of the Chandra Shekhar’s caretaker government took a momentous decision and conferred on the Gujjars and Bakerwals the status of Scheduled Tribe. The April 19 decision, inter-alia, entitled the Gujjars and Bakerwals to a share of 10 percent in the State service and other sectors (Ibid., 2000).

**Political Empowerment of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir:**

The announcement made by the Chief Minister, Jammu and Kashmir in a function at Jammu to bring a Bill in the State Legislature for political reservation of Scheduled Tribes and to amend the Constitution in this regard generated a new ray of hope among 12 tribal communities of the State which include Boot, Beda, Moon, Garra, Chnagpa, Balti, Purigpa, Shina-dard of Ladhak besides Gujjars and Bakerwals, Gaddi and Sippi tribes of the State.

Gujjar community which constitutes a major group among tribals of Jammu and Kashmir is politically very important. This third largest ethnic group of State has welcomed and hailed this announcement made by the Hon’ble Chief Minister, because
according to them this is the only way which will eradicate their poverty, caste stigma and social inequality.

After delimitation, when Assembly segments were re-constituted in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the tribal Gujjar community emerged as a significant political force. Knowing this, the tribal ethnic group was united beyond imagination, therefore, it embossed as an important vote bank which was very difficult to ignore or surpass by the political parties of the State. In short, the role being played by Muslim minority vote at national level politics, the same role is being played by Gujjar votes in Jammu and Kashmir State (Rahi, 2011).

Jammu and Kashmir State has substantial chunk of tribal population which plays a big role in political process and power formations. There are 21 Assembly constituencies where Gujjars constitute 20% to 50% of franchise. Besides this there are nine Assembly segments where Gujjar candidates won elections which include, Haveli, Suronkote, Mendher, Rajouri, Darhal, Gool, Arnas, Kangan and Uri. In other 13 Constituencies, where Gujjar vote bank can turn the tables include, Kalakote, Kupwara, Karnah, Reasi, Nagrota, Inderwal, Noorabad, Shopiyan, Kokernag, Shang, Tangmarg, Pahalgam and Langate. Except Leh district of Jammu and Kashmir, Gujjars live in every corner of the State and each Assembly as well as Parliamentary Constituencies in the shape of substantial vote bank. This is the only community of the State who take part in elections in Militancy affected areas despite the threat perceptions.

Gujjar vote bank is a deciding factor in a number of Assembly segments in J&K State. As per 2001 census, Gujjars are the third largest linguistic and ethnic group in the region. If language is criteria, then after Kashmiri and Dogri, there is maximum population of Gujjars in the State. Ethnically, they have second largest population after Kashmiri where as Rajputs both Hindu and Muslim form third largest ethnic entity of the State. This fact is also relevant even in today's politics of Jammu and Kashmir. As far as the history is concerned, Jammu and its surrounding districts were covered by Gujjars and had emerged as a significant political, social and cultural force even before 1947. There were many habitations of Gujjars in main towns and cities besides the surrounding areas of Jammu region.
For political parties of the State, to recognize Gujjars as an important and significant force openly, was a tedious one. After independence various races and groups tried to emerge on socio-political scenario of the State but Gujjars who were pushed to remote and far flung areas lacked behind in all walks of life. All linguistic and ethnic groups progressed in a big way during past 60 years but this was not the case with the Gujjars.

After various recommendations by a number of Commissions and Panels constituted by the Central and State Government from time to time for amelioration of the lot of weaker sections of society in India, the Government of India had sanctioned funds for the development and upliftment of the Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir in early seventies. Congress party and Mrs. Indira Gandhi took keen interest in the political vote bank of Gujjars and organized big rallies and conferences. A department was also established to look after the Gujjars’ affairs. Former Minister Ch. Mohd. Shafi Khatana was entrusted the job of betterment of Gujjar and Bakerwal community and he was given a post of Advisor to Government of Jammu and Kashmir for Gujjars Affairs in 1971-72. This is for the first time that political importance of the Gujjars was recognized in order to achieve maximum gains. At that time, a good chunk in the budget outlay of the State specified for the development and welfare of the Gujjars in the State (Ibid., 2011).

The Gujjars politics has mainly remained influenced by Mian Family of Wangat Kangar, Kashmir. Since 1952, after Mian Nizam-ud-din and Mian Bashir Ahmad, Mian Altaf Ahmad is representing Gujjars in the State Legislative Assembly. This family has been associated with National Conference regime as well and Congress has many a times sort assistance from Mian family for achieving their political targets with the help of Gujjar vote bank.

After establishing ‘State Advisory Board’ for the Development of Gujjar and Bakerwals in the State in 1974-75, the Central Government released a special assistance of Rs. 13 crores to the State for the upliftment and betterment of Gujjar Bakerwal community. A few Special Plans including opening of Gujjar Hostels, scholarships to the Gujjar children of the State, rehabilitation of the Gujjar nomads were initiated. This was a great step towards recognizing the Gujjars as an important and significant vote bank by
the Congress and National Conference. As per routine, the members of Gujar Board are mainly nominated by the party in power. They belong to such areas where party in power has to oblige the Gujar local level leadership like mukkadams, chouhdaries, sarpanches and panches and others to oblige Gujar vote bank. Besides, the Gujar workers are given possible perks to work for the party. This Board is of State level but it has also formulated its district bodies which help the District Administration to implement the various development plans for the Gujjars.

In 1975-76, when Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah came to power, the first Advisory Board was framed and Gujar found its place in National Conference hierarchy as well. Begum Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was the first Vice Chairperson of the Board. She through medium of Gujri Language and by working hard in Gujar areas succeeded in gaining the attention of all the Gujar leadership and they steadily and gradually joined National Conference. Owing positive steps of the Gujar Board, it was a new era for Tribal Community.

To oblige Gujar vote banks, the National Conference regime recommended for a grant of Scheduled Tribe status to Gujar and Bakarwals in the State in 1988-89. To answer this move, the coalition at the Center in which the Congress was a major partner granted Scheduled Tribe Status to Gujjars and Bakarwals on 19th April, 1991(Ibid., 2011).

**Gujjars and Identity Politics:**

‘Identity politics’ may be said to convey two different discourse if it is analysed in two different ways i.e. ‘identity politics’ and ‘politics of identity’. Thus, before getting into concrete debates over the issue we must understand the nuances of these two terms which sound almost similar if we take them casually.

When we talk about the concept of ‘identity politics’, it somewhere refers to or is associated with certain political benefits or ends. To achieve these ends the politics is often built on such discourses that supports its sustenance and is easily accepted by people. Thus, culture, religion, language, gender, class and many such markers which
determine major contemporary and traditional discourses play important role in shaping the course and destiny of many movements based on ‘identity politics’.

Identity politics is one way we suggest to view how culture and identity, variously perceived to be traditional, modern, radical, local, regional, religious, gender, class and ethnic, are articulated, constructed, invented and commodified as the means to achieve political ends. In this sense we see identity politics as discourse and action within public arenas of political and civil society, wherein culture is used to subvert, support, protect and attack, and where identity cannot be understood without some recourse to wider theorizing and comparisons of the institutions, practices and ideologies of national states, governments, political parties, transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and international and supranational organizations, like the United Nations and European Union (http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com/).

The politics of identity refers more to issues of personal and group power. Such power is considered to be located within and across all social and political institutions and collectivities. It is often argued that it is these institutions and collectivities that force people to either choose or to interact with each other in part on the basis of their shared, or divergent, notions of their identities. One may associate ‘politics of identity’ with more of private domain. Thus, it may be taken as a phenomenon that operates more readily from within and below. People generally are in a position, therefore, to identify with their alienation and triumph on their own. Thus, agencies and institutions do play a role but not that overtly as in the case of ‘identity politics’. The latter is a phenomenon that operates more from above and is often subjected to manipulation and artificial construction by the leaders and institutions for certain gains. Therefore, it may be said that ‘identity politics’ is a formal politics involving directly the political actors and agencies, while ‘politics of identity’ is something to do with basic political values that may be interpreted differently by different people.

The politics of identity can take place in any social setting and are often best and first recognized in domains of the private, the subaltern, the subversive, where culture may be the best way or means to express one’s loss or triumph, whereas identity politics depend to a great deal on institutions and application of economic and political power,
within and sometimes across generally accepted administrative boundaries. Identity politics refers mainly to the ‘top down’ processes whereby various political, economic and other social entities attempt to mould collective identities, based on ethnicity, race, language, and place, into relatively fixed and ‘naturalized’ frames for understanding political action and body politic. The ‘politics of identity’ refers to a more ‘bottom up’ process through which local people challenge, subvert, or negotiate culture and identity and contest structures of power and wealth that constrain their social lives. While ‘identity politics’ is a type of formal, structural and public politics, practices by Governments, parties and corporate institutions, in the political arenas of cities, regions, states, the ‘politics of identity’ refer more to political practices and values that are based on subscription or ascription to various and often overlapping social and political identities (ibid.).

Identity politics is the expression and assertion of distinct, separate and autonomous existence of the dominated identity, despite its non-recognition by the dominant identity. The objective of the identity politics in the first phase of its struggle is to get recognition by the dominated identity of its distinct and autonomous existence from the dominant identity within the fold of the larger trans-group identity. In the second phase of the identity politics, the leaders of dominated identity assert the problems of their group’s marginality because of its permanent dominated or object status despite the claim of equality in the modern national ideal structure of social interaction defined in the Constitution.

In the third and final phase of identity politics demand is asserted to reframe the structure of social interaction in a fair and just manner so that the notion of equality becomes a reality. This phase of identity politics is also called politics of empowerment. Empowerment is liberation and emancipation of the dominated identity from permanent subordination or subjugation. In practice it means reconstitution of the structure of social interaction in which the due share of the dominated identity in the process of decision-making is assured (Tajuddin, 2008).

Over the years, with the assistance of various Government and non-Government organizations, the Gujjars have been able to assert their distinct identity. They have
become a force to reckon with and their views and opinions are sought in discussions and
dialogues undertaken on the issues of J&K. Today, as they mobilize and lobby for
political reservation, other groups are being formed that not only demand separate status,
but also question the advantages given to the Gujjars. One of the most formidable groups
that has emerged in the course of time is that of the ‘Paharis’. With both the Gujjars and
Paharis vying for special provisions and status, the identity politics in the context of
Scheduled Tribe has become strong and in most cases the two identities are getting
polarized. Though there are other groups also who have begin to assert their identities,
the Paharis are the ones who are lobbying for Scheduled Tribe status more strongly. This
chapter focuses on the issue of identity politics played largely between the Gujjars and
the Paharis in the State of J&K.

The non-Gujjar Muslims of the State have been peeved at the conferment of
Scheduled Tribe status and its benefits to the Gujjars. They have now demanded similar
concession and the privileges associated with it for the Paharis of Rajouri, Poonch,
Kupwara and Baramulla districts i.e., where the Gujjars are in sizeable numbers. The new
Pahari demand was backed by the Valley dominated political and bureaucratic Muslim
elite, which succeeded in persuading the State Governor to take a few steps in this
direction. On 17 May 1992, the non-Gujjar “Pahari Board” was set up, with eight
Kashmiri Muslims, eight Rajput Muslims, two Syeds and four non-Muslims as its
members. On 18 December 1993, the then State Governor, General K.V.Krishna Rao,
issued a statement urging the Central government to declare the Paharis as Scheduled
Tribes. These attempts to construct new identities such as Paharis, it was believed were
aimed at undermining the Gujjars and their ethno-political aspirations in the areas where
they are dominant. It is alleged that because of this reason the demands of Paharis of
Rajouri, Poonch, Kupwara and Baramulla, (where Gujjars are concentrated) are raised,
whereas the backward and neglected hill people of Ramban, Kishtwar, Padar,
Bhadarwah, who speak distinct dialects of Rambani, Kishtwari, Padari and Bhadarwahi,
have been excluded from the purview of the so called Pahari. It was considered to be a
subtle move to deprive the Gujjars of their numerical advantage and fully marginalize
them in the political, administrative and other institutional structures of the State (Warikoo and Som, 2000).

The upshot of the arguments advanced by the Paharis and the Valley’s political leadership was that the Paharis, like the Gujjars and Bakerwals, speak a distinct language and, hence, they should also be treated as a Scheduled Tribe. It is pertinent to mention here that this was not the first occasion when the influential and affluent Muslims of Rajouri, Poonch, Kupwara and Baramulla districts had conspired against the Gujar Muslims. The first time the opulent Muslims plotted against the Gujjars and Bakerwals was in 1989, when the Central leaders came out with a categorical assurance that the Gujjars and Bakerwals, along with Ladakhis, Sippis and Gaddis, would be given the status of Scheduled Tribe (Hari Om, 2000).

The mobilization of Pahari identity started and became ‘vociferously’ asserted in the Muslim dominated border region of Rajouri and Poonch districts of J&K in the late 1990s. The data reveals that Pahari community constitutes 65% of the total population in the border regions, most of whom are Muslims. However, Pahari identity is such a master umbrella that it embraces various communities and transcends religious divisions. Thus, Pahari identity includes all the people who belong to that defined particular region or more commonly as defined by the ideologues of the Pahari identity politics. It includes those who speak ‘pahari’ language or who cater to such parameters as is put forward by the concerned recognized organizations, thereby including all – Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs etc. as well as all castes and groups. The ‘Pahari’ community has been making demands of Scheduled Tribe status for themselves and inclusion of ‘pahari’ language in the VIIIth schedule of the Constitution of India.

The ‘Pahari’ identity is portrayed and identified as a linguistic identity and is usually pitched against ‘Gujjar’ identity. The Pahari versus Gujjar issue is a potential source of ethnic conflict as both the Pahari and Gujjar interests are in conflict with each other as both claim ST status. Both the ‘Pahari’ and ‘Gujjar’ identities overlap in certain aspects particularly their hill settlement pattern and some common language features. The grant of Scheduled Tribe status on 19th April 1991 by the Central Government, entitles
the Gujjars-the third largest community in the State, to preferential treatment in Government services, education, professional and technical education etc. The non-Gujjar Muslims of the State have been feeling ignored due to the conferment of Scheduled Tribe status and its benefits to the Gujjars. They now demand similar concession and the privileges associated with it for the ‘Paharis’ of Rajouri, Poonch, Kupwara and Baramulla districts i.e. where the Gujjars are in sizeable numbers. The new ‘pahari’ demand has been backed by the Valley dominated political and bureaucratic Muslim elite, which has succeeded in persuading the State Governor to take a few steps in this direction (Himalayan Mail, Jammu, 15 December, 2003).

The Pahari makes an interesting study of the imagination and construction of an identity. Till a few decades back there was no such identity known as Pahari identity. Basically Paharis are the non-Gujjar sections of society who live in certain hilly Gujjar dominated areas outside Dogra speaking Jammu and Kashmiri speaking valley. Living among Gujjars, they have been politicized as a Pahari identity mainly in competition with the Gujjars. When the Gujjars started demanding the Scheduled Tribe status, the non-Gujjars living in those areas felt the need to consolidate their identity in order to claim the same benefits as the Gujjars would be gaining from the ST status. And when Scheduled Tribe status was granted to the Gujjars by the Central Government, then other communities started getting mobilized under the banner of the Pahari identity to claim similar ST status.

Paharis compare their socio-economic status with the Gujjars and argue that because of reservation the Gujjars have better employment and educational opportunities, which have been denied to the Paharis. In fact they claim that at the present moment, it is not the Gujjars who are backward but the Paharis. Earlier it was due to their nomadic condition because of which they were quite backward (Memorandum presented to the Government of India by Jammu and Kashmir Pahari Speaking People Forum on August 08, 1989).

Paharis have not been able to get the ST status mainly for the reason that they have not been able to satisfy the Centre with the conditions laid down for being claimed to be STs. However, due to their mobilization, the political parties have been able to
appreciate the political value of the Paharis who constitute a large number of people in at least four districts of the State. Hence, these parties have contributed in the construction of a Pahari identity.

The Pahari identity, however, is an inclusive identity and operates over and above the religious divide. There is a whole ‘Pahari-Gujjar’ issue that has become a topic of debate and discourse at the intellectual and political level. It has been an accepted fact that Gujjars got patronization from the Central Government way back since late 1980s, as a result of which they got for themselves ST status. The reason for this patronization on the part of Central Government is usually attributed that Congress which was in power at that time tried to split the Kashmiri Muslim Constituency by creating another vote bank of Gujjars based on linguistic-cultural identity. Now non Gujjar Muslims who witnessed the progress and improvement of socio-economic status of their Gujjar brethren as a result of this ST status felt deprived and marginalized who share the same socio-economic conditions. They started asserting for themselves but needed a distinct identity so that they may be demarcated from the rest, the identity that was constructed thus was on linguistic basis i.e. Pahari identity. They got the support of the State Government, mainly National Conference to counter the Gujar identity.

Gujjars however, oppose grant of Schedule Tribe status to the Paharis. It needs to be noted that Pahari speaking people have been approaching the powers that be in New Delhi and the State Civil Secretariat time and again and persuading them to grant them Schedule Tribe status. They have been telling the authorities that they, like the Gujjars also inhabit the backward areas, that the problem faced by them are not different, and that they deserve a special treatment as they speak a different language (Pahari). In other words, they have been soliciting the support of the authorities in favour of an instrument that not only establish parity between them and the Gujjars but restore the pre-1991 position so that they are able to regain the ground they lost to the Schedule Tribe communities (Hari Om, 1998).

The Gujjars argue that they were declared as Scheduled Tribe in 1991 after a prolonged struggle over four decades, and there erupted a concerted and well organized campaign by the Pahari speaking people enjoying the Government patronage to render
them irrelevant on social, political and economic landscape of Jammu and Kashmir. This move of Paharis is being seen as a deep conspiracy by the Gujjars to ensure that they do not get their due benefits. According to them, during last few years the Pahari speaking people, in a well thought out design to alienate the nationalistic forces in Jammu and Kashmir, have started demanding Scheduled Tribe status without qualifying the basic criteria for inclusion into Schedule Tribe (Ibid., 1998).

The Gujjars argue that there is absolutely nothing which suggests that there exist any such tribe as Paharis anywhere in the State or elsewhere in the country. The tribal communities are well defined, with their roots fully known and identified. The people of established tribes have their own distinct common ethos, traits of life system and cultural background. There is nothing in the official records or statutes remotely suggesting the existence of any such nomadic tribe as Pahari in both the Jammu and Kashmir regions. There is no reference whatsoever to show that the Paharis have at any point of time been recognized as members of the Other Backward Classes (O.B.Cs) (Hari Om, Resolving the Gujar-Pahari controversy, The State Times, Jammu, January 23, 2006).

Many ethnic groups, after recognition of Gujjars, Bakerwals, Gaddis, Ladhakis and Sippis of the Jammu and Kashmir State as Scheduled Tribe, have now started demanding ST status. Some political leaders with doubtful integrity are trying to make out a case for securing similar benefit for a particular area of the State on the plea of being ‘Paharis’ (term recently invented). These leaders are desperate to retain their hegemony and domination over the tribes.

Gujjars argued that no community, class of people or inhabitants of any region of J&K State ever called themselves as ‘Paharis’ in the past and, contrary to it, the entire State is mountainous and hilly and all those living in the State could be in a common parlance called ‘Paharis’ like people of Himachal Pradesh and Garhwal region of Uttar Pradesh etc. People speaking Dogri language and its sister-dialects in Jammu region of J&K State have been in fact claiming Dogri as Pahari as reflected in many census reports and other records as their mother-tongue as both the names symbolized one language. There is no particular class of people who could be said to have Pahari different than Dogri as their mother-tongue. There is no identification of definition of any such tribe
who claims to be Paharis by virtue of its being inhabitant of particular area, or speaking particular dialect and, therefore, attributing this term for a confined area has absolutely no justification (Hari Om, 2000).

The main objections of the Gujjars against the demand of Pahari speaking people for granting Scheduled Tribe status are as under:

a) They, unlike them, are financially and politically sound.

b) They, unlike them, belong to privileged, social and political groups who have been enjoying and sharing the State power ever since 1947.

c) No community could be granted the Scheduled Tribe status on the basis of language and territory.

d) The grant of Scheduled Tribe status to the Pahari people would mean nothing but a status quo ante and negation of the step the Union Government took in 1991 with a view to ameliorating their socio-cultural and politico-economic lot.

The Gujar organizations strongly opposed the Pahari speaking people demand for Scheduled Tribe status and warned the State Government against any such move on the basis that the Paharis have neither been as a weaker section nor have they approached any of the Commissions set up to look into the issues of reservations from time to time. Such class of people has neither been defined in any work of history, anthropology or census, nor even mentioned in revenue records. Disputing Paharis claim for Scheduled Tribe status, the Gujjars and Bakerwal Joint Forum (GBJF) said that being an affluent class, the Paharis did not suffer from any social stigma, which was the most important criteria to declare a particular class as Scheduled Tribe. The Paharis is an amalgamation of various castes and communities and not a single caste group like the Gujjars. Arguing that dialect or language or territory was not the criteria to accord Scheduled Tribe status to a particular section of people; the Forum said that the demand of the Pahari speaking people was based as the premise of language and the region they inhabit.

The Forum has also sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh and the former Home Minister Shivraj Patil; claiming that some people with vested
interests were trying to accord Tribal status to Pahari language for grabbing benefits to which only tribal people are entitled to.

Gujjars and Bakerwals of the Jammu and Kashmir argued that the Pahari speaking people are the ruling class and they are educationally and economically sound class of people in Jammu and Kashmir and the Scheduled Tribe Status should not be granted to the Pahari speaking people as it would dilute the distinct tribal character of the Gujjars and take away from them avenues of welfare and development in most undemocratic manner (Editorial, The Kashmir Times, February 14, 2006).

The Gujar Girls’ Federation Jammu (GGFJ) has taken a strong exception to state Cabinet decision recommending Scheduled Tribe status to Pahari speaking people. Asiya Rasool Chowdhary, the Chairman of Gujar Girls’ Federation Jammu (GGFJ) alleged that coalition Government of Congress-PDP which was established in 2002 Assembly elections has done an act detrimental to the Gujjars of the State. The members alleged that State Cabinet’s recommendation in advocating Scheduled Tribe status to Pahari speaking people were against the Constitutional right of Gujjars of the State (Editorial, The Kashmir Times, February 12, 2006).

All this suggests that Gujjars view themselves as altogether a distinct group with ethnic tribal base. They consider themselves separate not only from Paharis but also from the Dogras and Kashmiris. Though most of the Kashmiri are Muslims like them, the Gujjars in no way identify themselves with them.

**Zirga (Biradari/ Community Panchayat):**

The Gujjars have an established system of **zirga**, which is an ancient institution of settling disputes and providing social control in their society. The **zirga** decides the disputes among its members.

The most important social organization among the Gujjars is the **biradari panchayat** (caste panchayat based on brotherhood). Generally a number of **deras** (families) merge to form a **biradari panchayat**. But these **deras** keep their independent identity as well. The leader or the head of the **biradari panchayat** is called **zaildar** (chief or head of the **biradari**) who is also selected on the basis of his age, his ability to work for the welfare of the **biradari**, and his experience as a group head. It is noted that a head of
the biradari panchayat is always the most respected and influential person and is considered to be an authority by the members of the group. The remaining group leaders and some elder members from the groups become the members of the biradari panchayat. In case of a dispute firstly the group leader in consultation with the elder members of that group tries to settle the dispute. In case a person does not feel satisfied with the decision then the dispute goes to the biradari panchayat. The decision of the biradari panchayat is final (Singh and Manohar, 1998). It is remarkable to note that the Gujjars approach the statutory panchayat or the judicial courts for the settlement of disputes only when the dispute is with the non-tribal society. Intra-tribal disputes are settled only in the biradari panchayat.

According to the study being conducted by Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation, the zirga are under the threat of extinction in J&K. The Tribal Judicial system zirga popular in Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir since centuries will become a history of past in next few decades if timely steps are not being taken by State Legislature for its recognition and protection by making these “Tribal Courts” constitutionally valid through an enactment, said a latest study conducted by ‘Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation’, a premier voluntary organization of Gujjars of Indian States. Dr. Javed Rahi, Secretary Tribal Foundation said that during the study it was found that this oldest popular system of justice needs immediate legal recognition otherwise this tradition will extinct in next few decades.

“Zirgas are still popular in tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan and enjoying legal sanctity but in Jammu and Kashmir this system is surviving since centuries without Constitutional safeguards” said Dr. Rahi and added “Gujjars consider this traditional judicial system as a vibrant instrument of their cultural heritage” and the organization will fight vigoursly for Constitutional recognition of zirgas in Jammu and Kashmir.

As per the study conducted among the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, around 72 percent still believe and practice traditional zirga system which is being headed by makkadams an elderly tribal which takes decisions on various issues by consensus. Some Gujjar women called mahries are also heading zirgas in some remotest areas of the State, the study revealed.
The study further said that the Gujar zirgas are more effective and powerful in community in difficult areas and the muqadams or mahries after listening to all parties or sides; pronounce a decision according to the oral customary law of the tribe or religious law. In case of bigger disputes senior leaders or religious personalities resolve the matters, the study said.

As per the study, due to un-availability of legal tools, Jammu and Kashmir Gujar zirgas are not interfering in criminal cases but they decide almost all other major ticklish disputes includes land and assets issues, family disputes, theft cases or other issues related to tribals.

All the members of the tribe are bound to respect zirga and if any party or parties fails to comply or respect a zirga decision, they are liable to be ousted. Gujjars believes that it is irreligious to defy the zirgas. Gujar zirga can award capital punishment, social boycott or expulsion from the community (Daily Excelsior, Jammu, 20th December, 2009).

It has been observed from the field that all the respondents i.e. 100 percent said that they do have a community panchayat and its role is to settle down the inter-community disputes on day-to-day basis, to settle down the marriage related disputes and to settle the land related disputes within the community members without outsider (police/court) intervention.

Regarding the difference between the statutory panchayat and biradari panchayat, the respondents shared the view that biradari panchayat is different from the statutory panchayat in the sense that the statutory panchayat is constituted with the due process of the Law and it has some powers to get it decisions implemented with the backing of Government agencies in case the warring members of the community do not agree to the decision of the panchayat members.

In urban areas where there is no existence of statutory or customary panchayats, judicial intervention is sought to settle the inter community disputes if the members do not agree with the decision of the community panchayat.
Table- 4.1: Responses towards mechanism to settle disputes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses in favour of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biradari panchayat</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>23.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory panchayat</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial courts</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>36.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>260</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Field based data*

When questioned about the modality used by the respondents to settle their disputes, it has been estimated from Table- 4.1 that 23.07 percent of the respondents responded that they preferred to settle their disputes through traditional panchayat; 21.15 percent favoured appeal to statutory panchayats; 19.23 percent responded in favour of judicial courts; and 36.53 percent did not respond.

**Participation of Gujjars in politics:**

The information gathered from the field processed and analyzed in the following paragraphs deals with the community role in decision making, participation in casting vote in electoral process, support given to the political party in the recent elections, incentives to participate in elections and role and voice in political sphere.

Table- 4.2: Responses about whether the community play role in decision making in the State Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role in decision-making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To some extent</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>71.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To greater extent</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>28.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligible</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>260</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Field based data*

Table- 4.2 suggests that 71.92 percent of the respondents were of the view that to some extent and 28.07 percent of the respondents were of the view that to a greater extent their community is aspiring to play a role in decision-making process of the State whether it be political reservation, participation in political process, participation at Government
level where they can get enhanced opportunities to put forward their demands effectively and getting the same implemented and more economic emancipation of the community by way of political reservation.

It has also been analyzed from the field data that respondents felt that participation in the electoral process means participation in political empowerment and subsequent participation at the Government level which leads to the projection and implementation of demands. This according to them would lead to the recognition of the identity in a more forceful manner.

On being asked whether they had cast their vote in the recent elections, all the respondents said that they have participated in the recent elections of the State.

**Table- 4.3: Responses towards vote cast by other family members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vote casted by other family members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarly</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>40.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual choices</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>59.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>260</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Field based data*

Table- 4.3 revealed that 59.61 percent of the respondents said that they exercised their individual choices and voted in favour of the party of their liking where as 40.38 percent of the respondents said that they voted in favour of one party only because they felt that particular party was more instrumental in getting them facilities and safeguards which the community is enjoying at present.

**Table- 4.4: Responses towards support given to political party**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support given to political party in recent elections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress Party</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>32.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>67.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>260</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Field based data*
Above Table- 4.4 revealed that a sizeable chunk of the respondents i.e. 67.30 percent were of the view that they have voted in favour of National Conference (NC) as that party was instrumental in getting them their due in the shape of ST status and many other demands of the community was projected and accepted from the NC platform. It is a fact that 32.69 percent of the respondents said that they have voted in favour of Congress Party which also has Gujar Representatives in the legislative Assembly and Council. Other parties might have polled a negligible percentage of Gujar votes.

A notable observance from the field suggested that Gujjar do have certain expectations and aspirations as a distinct community. They felt that their expectations and aspirations means acceptance of their specific demands such as inclusion of Gojri language in the VIII\textsuperscript{th} schedule of the Indian Constitution, protection of their specific rights, culture and identity. They also expect Government to do more for political empowerment of their community like representation in State Legislation Assembly.

It has also been observed from the field that all the respondents shared the view that if they participate in the electoral process, they are sure to get incentives in the form of their representatives being sent to legislatures where they can effectively air the promises made by the Government at the time of elections and get those promises converted into realities.

On being asked how strong your voice is in political sphere, all the respondents revealed that at the present moment their voice is not very strong but at least they are now being heard in a better way and in the future their voice will be heard more strongly.

\textbf{Table- 4.5: Responses about enhancement as a distinct community}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whether political reservation will further enhance the status of</td>
<td>To some extent</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being as a distinct community</td>
<td>To greater extent</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negligible</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source: Field based data}
Table- 4.5 suggested that 75.76 percent of the respondents felt that to a greater extent and 24.23 percent of the respondents felt that to some extent, the political reservation in the Legislature and subsequent participation at the Government level is certainly going to enhance their status as a distinct identity because at the political level they can fight out for their distinct identity in a more substantial and effective manner.

The analysis in this chapter shows that the participation of Gujjars has increased over the years. They are making all efforts to organize themselves and adopt all means to mobilize as a separate group. With these initiatives, they are able to assert themselves better than before as a distinct identity. However, they feel that they can play a stronger role in the politics of the State and would do so in future. In an attempt to carve out political space for themselves, they do come in confrontation with other groups trying to establish their own identities. The most prominent of this, as shown in this study is the ‘Paharis’. This chapter has tried to analyze the politics of identity being played in the State of J&K wherein different groups try to keep their hands above others. The conflict for power within the category of Scheduled Tribes has enabled the Gujjars and Paharis to emerge as two rival groups. The Gujjars do not have problem if the Paharis are given any other status like the OBCs (Other Backward Classes), but they oppose Scheduled Tribe status to them. Such is the identity politics of those vying for Scheduled Tribe status in J&K today.