

VOICES *Across the*  
PIR PANJAL

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A PAHARI TRIBE



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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A PAHARI TRIBE

*Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir*



**NEW DELHI PUBLISHERS**

New Delhi, Kolkata

This First Edition Published in 2025

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**Title:** *Voices Across the Pir Panjal an Ethnographic Study of a Pahari Tribe*

**Author:** Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir

**Description:** First edition | New Delhi Publishers 2025 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

**Identifiers:** ISBN 9789349897281 (Print) | 9789349897625 (eBook) | (Hardbound)

**Cover Design:** New Delhi Publishers

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**NEW DELHI PUBLISHERS**

**Head Office:** 90, Sainik Vihar, Mohan Garden, New Delhi, India

**Corporate Office:** 7/28, Room No. 208-209, Vardaan House, Mahavir Lane, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi, India

**Branch Office:** 216, Flat-GC, Green Park, Narendrapur, Kolkata, India

**Tel:** 011-23256188, 011-45130562, 9971676330, 9582248909

**Email:** ndpublishers@gmail.com

**Website:** www.ndpublisher.in

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir is a sociologist residing in Kashmir, specializing in the sociology of ethnicity, tribal dynamics and the border regions of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh. He earned his postgraduate degree in Sociology from the University of Kashmir and completed his M.Phil in 2017. Subsequently he pursued his Ph.D. in the same department from February 2017 to August 2021. Dr. Mir has authored numerous research papers and articles published in esteemed journals and national newspapers, including the International Sociological Association, The Telegraph, Outlook and the Economic and Political Weekly. In addition to his articles, he has written books such as *Cultural Encyclopedia of Dard Tribe; Journey through Gurez and Ladakh*, “*Sociological Inquiry of Justice: Exploring the Dards of Gurez Valley*” and “*Identity Erosion of Dards under the Making of Nation States.*”

Dr. Mir is recognized for his work titled “Cultural Encyclopedia of the Dard Tribe.” This groundbreaking book is unparalleled in India as it represents the first comprehensive study of the Dardistan region detailing the socio-cultural and historical dynamics as well as the evolving trends within the Dard community in Kashmir and Ladakh. It delves into the remote areas and the intricate cultural specifics of the Dard tribe. This work is the result of a decade-long investigation into the Dard-Brokpa tribe providing an in-depth understanding of the community through both sociological and anthropological discussions.

He has Presented over 50 research papers at national and international conferences hosted by esteemed institutions such as Lund University in Sweden, Hamburg University in Germany, University College London, Maynooth University in Ireland, Aarhus University in Denmark, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Indian Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), Hyderabad Central University, Delhi University and the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), among others. For the past 12 years, Suheel Rasool has focused his research on various tribes in Kashmir, including the Pahari, Gujjar, Bakarwal and Dard communities in the border regions of Pir Panjal, Kargil and Ladakh. His work encompasses a range of topics from examining distinctive tribal customs and rituals to advocating for policies aimed at enhancing and safeguarding the time-honored traditions of these tribes.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

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Suheel Rasool Mir's research provides an in-depth understanding of Pahari community, which predominantly inhabits the northern areas of the Indian subcontinent, particularly within certain sections of Jammu and Kashmir. The Pahari community is characterized by its distinct cultural and linguistic elements and Mir's sociological research provides critical insights into their social organization, identity and various challenges they encounter. This extensive effort culminated in a significant publication titled "*VOICES ACROSS THE PIR PANJAL; An Ethnographic Study of a Pahari Tribe.*"

The book delves into the secluded terrain of the Pir Panjal range while unraveling the complex cultural intricacies of the Pahari people. Mir's three years of dedicated research serves as a valuable resource for grasping the socio-historical context of this tribe. The text centers on their ethnic identity, cultural practices and traditional values, allowing readers to explore their rich historical legacy alongside current aspects of social existence through modern sociological and anthropological lenses. The work offers a well-rounded comprehension of the tribe, framed through sociological and anthropological discussions.

By highlighting the Pahari tribe, this work emphasizes the obstacles confronting this invisible community. It illuminates their socio-economic realities, cultural traditions and the effects of political and environmental shifts on their lifestyle. Such raised awareness is likely to foster empathy and bolster support for initiatives aimed at meeting the needs and safeguarding the rights of the Pahari people. The book stands as an essential tool for academics, policymakers and the general audience, fostering a deeper understanding of the Pahari community and its rich cultural heritage.

The book is primarily for postgraduate, research scholars and academicians. Besides postgraduate students, Research scholars and social scientists can also take help from this book. Academic libraries can use this book for students and scholars they can take benefits out of this book.





## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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A thorough ethnographic exploration through the mountains, valleys and pastoral pathways of the Pir Panjal region led to the creation of this book titled “VOICES ACROSS THE PIR PANJAL; An Ethnographic Study of a Pahari Tribe.” This endeavour would not have been achievable without the kindness, warmth and bravery of those who welcomed me into their homes, shared their memories and opened their hearts to me.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the residents of Karnah, Poonch, Rajouri, Uri and Baramulla. Their elders recounted their tales, while the women and youth shared insights about the evolution and continuity of their lives. The foundation of this work is truly built upon your narratives and the experiences.

I extend my thanks to the Pahari Culture Centre (PCC) in Tangdhar for their tremendous support and for granting me the freedom to work independently. I cannot envision navigating this journey without the backing of PCC. It has indeed been an honor to operate under their auspices.

My deep appreciation goes to local scholars, students and members of civil society in the Pir Panjal region who offered advice, perspectives and assistance during my field research. I would particularly like to acknowledge my Pahari friends from Karnah valley, Poonch, Rajouri and Uri, who helped me successfully navigate both the linguistic and geographical complexities of the area.

I must also highlight the unwavering support of my family and friends, whose encouragement provided me with the time, space and fortitude necessary to fully immerse myself in this project.

Finally, I wish to thank my father Gh. Rasool Mir, my mother Hamida Begum and my maternal uncle Ghulam Mohammad Wani for their understanding and belief in my abilities. Your prayers, encouraging words and willingness to assist at every turn have had a significant impact on this journey and for that, I am truly grateful. I aspire for this work to make you proud.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the research participants for their valuable insights and contributions. This book has taken several years to come to fruition and I truly could not have accomplished it without their support. It is dedicated to the people of Karnah, Uri, Poonch and Rajouri.

Lastly, I hold deep respect for the Pir Panjal itself, with its majestic mountains, migrations, quietude and melodies. The humble aim of this book is to honor its people and their narratives.

To anyone I may have inadvertently omitted, thank you!

**Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir**



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- J&K – Jammu and Kashmir
- UT – Union Territory
- PP – Pir Panjal
- LoC – Line of Control
- DDB – District Development Board
- BDC – Block Development Council
- PRI – Panchayati Raj Institutions
- GD – Focus Group Discussion
- KI – Key Informant
- ID – In-Depth Interview
- RRA – Rapid Rural Appraisal
- PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal
- NSS – National Sample Survey
- SC/ST/OBC – Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe / Other Backward Class
- ASR – Annual Status Report (if used in development data)
- CBO – Community-Based Organization
- NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
- PTJ – Pahari Tribe of Jammu
- PTPP – Pahari Tribe of Pir Panjal
- PTK – Pahari Tribe of Karnah
- BKD – Bakarwal Dog (ethnographic focus point)
- PMR – Pahari Marriage Rituals
- PRS – Pahari Religious Syncretism
- PPZ – Pir Panjal Zone
- PVB – Pahari Vikas Board
- EWS – Economically Weaker Sections

- PST – Pahari Speaking Tribe (as per constitutional status)
- RBA – Reserved Backward Area
- STP – Scheduled Tribe Proposal (for the inclusion of Paharis under ST status)
- MLA/MP – Member of Legislative Assembly / Member of Parliament
- EDC – Educational Development Committee
- SHP – Seasonal Highland Pasture
- NREGA – National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
- SDH – Sub-District Hospital (for health access issues)
- BRO – Border Roads Organisation
- ASHA – Accredited Social Health Activist
- AWC – Anganwadi Centre

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## PREFACE

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The book titled as the *Voices Across the Pir Panjal* explores the Pahari Ethnic Tribe of Jammu and Kashmir, a diverse community with linguistic, cultural and socio-political complexities. It provides a comprehensive anthropological and sociological account of their lives in the mountainous pirpanjal region, highlighting their resilience and cultural richness.

This book explores the history, culture and contemporary struggles of the Pahari people, providing a comprehensive anthropological and sociological account of their unique blend of resilience and cultural richness in pir panjal region of Jammu and Kashmir. The Paharis, a diverse community characterized by resilience, cultural richness and socio-economic challenges, are a subject of scholarly attention due to their shared heritage and language.

*Voices Across the Pir Panjal* was inspired by the realisation that the Pahari community was under-represented in the larger story of ethnic diversity in Jammu and Kashmir. The Paharis, despite their substantial presence in districts like Poonch, Rajouri, Baramulla and Kupwara, have frequently remained on the fringes of scholarly discourse, while groups like the kashmiri, Gujjars, Bakarwals and Dogras have received a great deal of attention from academics and policymakers. By focussing on the Pahari experience, examining their secular identity, linguistic heritage and the socio-political factors that have influenced their pursuit of recognition most notably, their recent inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list in 2024 this book aims to close this gap.

In order to shed light on the cultural practices, social practices and historical experiences of the Pahari community, this study draws on a extensive research, including archival sources, ethnographic insights and current socio-political analyses. The Paharis are positioned within the larger anthropological and sociological frameworks of ethnicity, identity and social equity in this work, which helps to clarify the intricacies of tribal and linguistic identities in a diverse and conflict-ridden region.

Scholars, students, policymakers and readers with an interest in South Asian anthropology and sociology especially those who are interested in indigenous studies, ethnic minorities and cultural preservation are the target audience for this book. In addition to giving the Pahari people a voice, I hope this work encourages a wider discussion about the opportunities and difficulties of acknowledging diverse identities in a socio-political environment that is changing quickly. This book serves as a tribute to their resilient nature and an appeal to acknowledge their legitimate position within Jammu and Kashmir's cultural and political fabric.

**Dr. Suheel Rasool Mir**