

Gujjars for national model to rehabilitate nomads in J&K

JAMMU, Nov 4: Demanding the adaptation of a national model to develop 'Forest Villages for the Tribal and Nomadic groups' of Jammu and Kashmir on the prototype of other States, the Scheduled Tribe Gujjar-Bakerwal on Sunday called for recognition of its primitive culture through extension of the National Conservation Act, 1980 and Forest Right Act 2006, to the State. This would help rehabilitate the community legally and constitutionally in areas belonging to it since centuries.

In an interaction programme organised by Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation a frontal organisation of the Gujjars, on nomads, held here the speakers sought intervention of state and central government for the extension of same Acts or identical legal provision in the State for J&K tribes. They pleaded for constitutional safeguards to rehabilitate the lakhs of the nomadic and semi-nomadic Gujjar-Bakerwal in forest villages.

Speaking on the occasion Dr. Javaid Rahi, Secretary, Tribal Foundation said that since both the Acts had not been extended to Jammu and Kashmir till date and in absence of similar rights in States Constitution, the nomadic communities especially the Gujjars and Bakerwals suffered a lot. He said there were thousands of tribal forest villages developed with the financial assistance of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in different States of India, but the nomads of J&K were without any such facilities.

Only Madhya Pradesh had developed 893 tribal forest villages to rehabilitate the nomads, Dr. Rahi said, adding that J&K nomads should be settled in forests by developing such villages in the State. After the enactment of the 1980 law, a programme was launched during the 10th Plan for the integrated development of thousands of forest villages originally identified with about 22.5 lakh tribal families from all over the country.

He said a big chunk of nomadic population of the community are shelter less and landless since centuries which deserves a fair deal at all levels.

It was aimed at raising the Human Development Index (HDI) of the inhabitants, providing basic facilities and services such as food, safe drinking water, health care, primary education, approach roads, and other infrastructural facilities.