

Social, Educational And Healthcare Development Among Gujjar And Bakarwal Tribes In Jammu And Kashmir

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Abstract:

The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, indigenous pastoralist groups residing in Jammu and Kashmir, India, possess a rich cultural heritage but encounter significant socio-economic hurdles. Despite their historical marginalization, they have maintained their traditional livestock-centric lifestyle while adapting to modern socio-economic shifts. Education, healthcare, and development serve as crucial pillars for their advancement. However, obstacles such as geographical isolation, insufficient infrastructure, and socio-economic constraints impede access to education, resulting in low enrollment and high dropout rates. Similarly, healthcare accessibility is hindered by geographical barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and a scarcity of healthcare professionals, despite the presence of traditional healing practices. Development initiatives aimed at these communities strive to enhance education, healthcare, and infrastructure while fostering socio-economic empowerment and livelihood improvement. Government policies, welfare programs, and NGO interventions are pivotal in addressing their socio-economic challenges. In summary, emphasizing education, healthcare, and development is indispensable for the comprehensive empowerment and sustainable progress of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir. Thus, the scholar endeavors to underscore the intricate interplay between educational, healthcare, and socio-economic

development amidst the myriad challenges faced by these communities.

Keywords: Gujjar, Bakarwal, Marginalized, Health, Education, Development, Economy, Welfare Measures .

Introduction

The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities are indigenous pastoralist groups primarily inhabiting the regions of Jammu and Kashmir in India. Descendants of nomadic tribes who migrated from Central Asia centuries ago, they have retained distinctive cultural traditions and a semi-nomadic way of life centered around herding livestock, primarily goats and sheep. Traditionally, the Gujjars are associated with cattle herding, while the Bakarwals are known for their expertise in sheep rearing. These communities have unique social structures and governance systems, often organized around extended family units and tribal councils. Historically marginalized and economically disadvantaged, they have faced challenges in accessing education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure. Despite this, the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities have demonstrated resilience in preserving their cultural heritage while adapting to socio-economic changes over time. Education, healthcare, and development play pivotal roles in the empowerment and upliftment of marginalized communities, including groups like the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir. Education provides marginalized individuals with essential knowledge, skills, and opportunities for personal and socio-economic advancement. Access to quality education enables them to break the cycle of poverty, broaden their horizons, and participate more effectively in the workforce, thereby improving their livelihood prospects. Moreover, education fosters critical thinking, empowerment, and social cohesion, empowering marginalized communities to advocate for their rights and contribute meaningfully to societal development. Healthcare is fundamental for ensuring the well-being and productivity of marginalized populations. Access to healthcare services, including preventive, curative, and rehabilitative care, is essential for reducing morbidity and mortality rates, improving overall health outcomes, and enhancing the quality of life. Additionally, investing in healthcare infrastructure and promoting health education can mitigate the impact of diseases and epidemics, thus promoting

community resilience and sustainable development. Lastly, holistic development initiatives encompassing economic, social, and environmental dimensions are crucial for addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by marginalized communities. Development interventions focused on income generation, infrastructure improvement, environmental conservation, and social inclusion can enhance the overall standard of living, promote human dignity, and foster inclusive growth. By prioritizing education, healthcare, and development, policymakers and stakeholders can empower marginalized communities to realize their full potential, contribute to national progress, and achieve social justice and equality.

Socio-economic Profile

The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir have a rich and complex history dating back centuries. Descendants of nomadic tribes that migrated from different parts of India and Central Asia, these communities have deep-rooted ties to the region and have played significant roles in its socio-economic and cultural landscape. Historically, the Gujjars and Bakarwals were primarily pastoralists, herding cattle, goats, and sheep across the rugged terrains of Jammu and Kashmir. Their semi-nomadic lifestyle allowed them to adapt to the diverse ecological niches of the Himalayan region, from the lush valleys to the high-altitude pastures. Over time, they developed intricate systems of seasonal migration, moving their herds in search of grazing lands and water sources.

The Gujjar community, known for their expertise in cattle herding, traditionally inhabited the lower-altitude regions of Jammu and parts of Kashmir, where they maintained close ties with settled agricultural communities. Meanwhile, the Bakarwals specialized in sheep rearing and were renowned for their knowledge of mountainous terrains, often venturing into the higher reaches of the Himalayas during the summer months. Throughout history, the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities have faced various challenges, including political upheavals, and socio-economic marginalization. Despite these hardships, they have preserved their distinct cultural identities, traditions, and social structures. Their oral traditions, folk music, dance, and craftsmanship reflect a vibrant cultural heritage that continues to thrive amidst modernization. In recent decades, the Gujjar and

Bakarwal communities have grappled with new challenges arising from rapid socio-economic transformations, environmental degradation, and political instability in the region. However, they have also shown resilience and adaptability, engaging in diverse livelihood activities, advocating for their rights, and actively participating in the socio-political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities are spread across various districts of Jammu and Kashmir, with concentrations in both the Jammu and Kashmir divisions. In the Jammu region, Gujjars are found in areas such as Rajouri, Poonch, Doda, and Udhampur districts, while Bakarwals are prevalent in the higher-altitude regions of the Pir Panjal and Great Himalayan ranges. In the Kashmir Valley, these communities are present in districts like Baramulla, Anantnag, and Kupwara, where they traditionally engage in seasonal migration between lowland and highland areas. The settlement patterns of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities are characterized by a combination of temporary encampments and semi-permanent and settled dwellings. During the summer months, when pastures are abundant in the high-altitude meadows, these communities establish temporary settlements known as "dhoks" or "maalas," typically consisting of tents or temporary shelters made from locally available materials. These dhoks serve as seasonal bases for grazing livestock and engaging in traditional activities such as dairy farming and handicraft production. In contrast, during the winter months, when harsh weather conditions prevail in the higher elevations, the communities descend to lower-altitude areas, where they may reside in more permanent settlements. The social organization of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities is characterized by kinship ties, clan affiliations, and collective decision-making structures. Extended family units, known as "khandans" or "baradaries," form the basis of social cohesion and mutual support within these communities. Additionally, tribal councils or assemblies, known as "jirgas," play a crucial role in resolving disputes, managing common resources, and making collective decisions related to community affairs. These traditional social institutions reflect a strong sense of solidarity and communalism among the Gujjar and Bakarwal populations, facilitating cooperation and mutual assistance in their daily lives.

The livelihood patterns and economic activities of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir have traditionally revolved around pastoralism, animal husbandry, and related trades. However, with changing socio-economic dynamics and environmental challenges, these communities have also engaged in a variety of modern economic activities to supplement their incomes. Historically, the primary livelihood of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities has been pastoralism, involving the rearing of livestock such as cattle, goats, and sheep. They rely on seasonal migration between lowland and highland areas to access grazing lands and water sources for their animals. This traditional practice allows them to optimize resource utilization and adapt to changing environmental conditions. Milk production from cattle and goats is a significant component of the traditional livelihoods of Gujjars and Bakarwals. They often process milk into various dairy products such as ghee, butter, and cheese, which are consumed locally or sold in nearby markets. The communities are known for their craftsmanship in producing traditional items such as woolen blankets, rugs, carpets, and leather goods. These handicrafts not only serve as sources of income but also represent cultural heritage and artistic expression. Historically, Gujjars and Bakarwals engaged in barter trade with settled agricultural communities, exchanging livestock and animal products for agricultural produce, grains, and other necessities.

In recent years, some members of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities have diversified their livelihoods by engaging in agriculture. They cultivate crops such as wheat, maize, and vegetables in the fertile lands of the valleys during the farming season. Many individuals from these communities seek wage labor opportunities in sectors such as construction, tourism, and government projects during the off-season or when not engaged in traditional pastoral activities. Some community members have ventured into small-scale businesses such as grocery shops, tea stalls, and transportation services to generate additional income and diversify their economic activities. With increasing access to education and government welfare schemes, younger generations from Gujjar and Bakarwal communities are pursuing formal education and seeking employment in the public and private sectors. Overall, while traditional livelihood patterns such as pastoralism remain central to the identity and sustenance of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, they are also adapting to

modern economic opportunities and challenges to ensure their socio-economic resilience and well-being.

Education

Access to education for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir is constrained by various challenges and barriers. These include geographical remoteness, as many settlements are located in isolated and difficult-to-reach areas, making it challenging to establish and maintain educational infrastructure. Limited availability of schools and educational facilities further exacerbates the issue, with inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, and insufficient learning materials hindering access to quality education. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, nomadic lifestyles, and traditional gender roles also contribute to low enrollment rates and high dropout rates, particularly among girls. Moreover, cultural barriers, language differences, and discrimination faced by marginalized communities further impede access to education, perpetuating cycles of inequality and marginalization. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to improve infrastructure, increase teacher recruitment and training, provide incentives for enrollment and retention, promote inclusive policies, and foster community participation and awareness about the importance of education for the overall development and empowerment of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities

The quality of education for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir is significantly impacted by the availability of schools, infrastructure, and teaching staff. Access to schools remains limited in many rural and remote areas where these communities reside, leading to challenges in ensuring equitable educational opportunities. In areas where schools exist, the infrastructure often lacks basic amenities such as proper classrooms, furniture, sanitation facilities, and electricity, creating an environment that is not conducive to learning. To address these challenges and improve the quality of education, there is a critical need for investment in educational infrastructure, recruitment and training of qualified teachers, provision of adequate teaching and learning materials, and implementation of supportive policies and programs tailored to the unique needs of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. Additionally, fostering community involvement and collaboration with local authorities and educational stakeholders

is essential for ensuring sustainable improvements in the quality of education and enhancing educational outcomes for these marginalized communities.

Several initiatives and interventions have been implemented to promote education within the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir. These include the establishment of mobile schools and seasonal hostels that cater to the nomadic lifestyle of these communities, providing access to education even during periods of migration. Efforts have been made to improve infrastructure by constructing new schools, renovating existing ones, and equipping them with essential facilities such as classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities. Specialized teacher training programs have been conducted to enhance the quality of instruction and address the shortage of qualified educators. Additionally, awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives have been launched to emphasize the importance of education and encourage parents to enroll their children in school, particularly girls. Scholarship programs, incentives, and stipends have also been introduced to support students from marginalized backgrounds and mitigate financial barriers to education. These initiatives, combined with targeted policies and partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community leaders, aim to promote equitable access to quality education and improve educational outcomes for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities.

Healthcare Services

Access to healthcare facilities and services for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir faces numerous challenges, including geographical remoteness, inadequate infrastructure, and limited availability of healthcare professionals. Many settlements inhabited by these communities are located in remote and mountainous areas, making it difficult to access healthcare facilities. Health infrastructure in these settlements is often rudimentary, with few primary healthcare centers and a lack of specialized medical services. As a result, community members may have to travel long distances to seek medical attention, which can be costly and time-consuming. Moreover, the shortage of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and midwives, further compounds the problem, leading to suboptimal healthcare delivery. Additionally, the communities face various health

challenges, including high rates of malnutrition, infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia, maternal and child health issues, and limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities, which contribute to poor health outcomes. Despite these challenges, traditional healing practices, including herbal medicine, spiritual healing, and midwifery, play a significant role in healthcare delivery within the communities. Traditional healers, known as "hakims" or "dais," often provide healthcare services and remedies based on indigenous knowledge and cultural beliefs, complementing modern medical care and serving as important sources of healthcare for community members, particularly in remote areas where access to formal healthcare services is limited. The National Rural Health Mission (NHM) is strategically crafted to catalyze substantial improvements in the healthcare framework and the general health status, predominantly in rural hinterlands across the nation. In Jammu and Kashmir, the mission accentuates the empowerment of the populace through the deployment of formidable mechanisms such as Rogi Kalyan Samities, decentralized strategizing and implementation, and fortifying physical infrastructure. Efforts to improve healthcare access and outcomes for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities require investments in healthcare infrastructure, recruitment and training of healthcare professionals, promotion of preventive and primary healthcare services, and integration of traditional healing practices into the formal healthcare system, taking into account the cultural and socio-economic context of these communities.

Development Initiatives and Opportunities

Government policies and programs targeting the development of Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir have been implemented to address their socio-economic challenges and promote inclusive growth. These initiatives include special schemes aimed at improving access to education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure in Gujjar and Bakarwal settlements, such as the provision of mobile schools, seasonal hostels, and healthcare camps. Additionally, affirmative action policies have been introduced to enhance representation and participation of these communities in governance structures and decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed. Furthermore, various welfare schemes, including housing subsidies, financial assistance, and skill development

programs, have been implemented to support socio-economic empowerment and livelihood enhancement among Gujjar and Bakarwal households. Moreover, the government has initiated land reforms and land regularization programs to secure land tenure rights for these communities, addressing historical injustices and facilitating access to resources for sustainable development. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as The Jammu and Kashmir Tribal United Forum, Gurjar Desh Charitable Trust (GDCT), and Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation (TRCF), and community-based initiatives also play a crucial role in promoting development among Gujjar and Bakarwal communities by providing grassroots-level support, advocacy, and capacity-building activities. These organizations work closely with community members to identify their needs, mobilize resources, and implement projects in areas such as education, healthcare, women's empowerment, environmental conservation, and livelihood promotion. Economic development projects and opportunities for income generation are being explored to create sustainable livelihood options for Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, including initiatives such as dairy farming cooperatives, handicrafts promotion, eco-tourism ventures, and small-scale enterprises. These projects aim to capitalize on the communities' traditional skills and resources while providing them with avenues for economic diversification and self-reliance. Education and healthcare play pivotal roles in fostering overall community development by empowering individuals with knowledge, skills, and access to essential services, thereby improving human capital, health outcomes, and socio-economic well-being. Investments in education and healthcare infrastructure, capacity-building, and awareness-raising campaigns are essential for building resilient and thriving Gujjar and Bakarwal communities that are able to harness their full potential and contribute to the sustainable development of Jammu and Kashmir.

Conclusion

The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir represent integral components of the region's cultural diversity and socio-economic fabric. Despite facing numerous challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, these communities exhibit remarkable resilience,

adaptability, and determination in the face of adversity. Government policies and programs, supplemented by the efforts of non-governmental organizations and community-based initiatives, have sought to address the needs and promote the development of Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, with a focus on enhancing access to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities. Moreover, the role of education and healthcare in fostering overall community development cannot be overstated, as investments in these areas contribute to the empowerment, well-being, and socio-economic advancement of community members. By recognizing the unique strengths and challenges of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities and implementing inclusive and sustainable development strategies, stakeholders can work towards building a more equitable and prosperous future for all residents of Jammu and Kashmir, ensuring that no community is left behind. Through collaboration, empathy, and shared commitment to social justice, the journey towards holistic development and inclusive growth can be advanced, paving the way for a more vibrant and resilient society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

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