



RESEARCH Article

Socio-Economic Status of the Gujjar Tribe In Himachal Pradesh: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic status of the Gujjar tribe, a semi-nomadic pastoral community in Himachal Pradesh, India. Despite their significant presence in the region, the Gujjars face challenges related to economic marginalization, limited access to education, and social exclusion. The study aims to provide a comprehensive description of their socio-economic conditions, focusing on income, education, occupation, and access to resources. Findings reveal low household income, limited educational attainment, and dependence on traditional occupations like animal husbandry. The study highlights the need for targeted policy interventions to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Gujjar tribe, emphasizing education, healthcare, and economic diversification.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Gujjar tribe, a semi-nomadic pastoral community, constitutes one of the prominent Scheduled Tribes in Himachal Pradesh, India. Traditionally, the Gujjars have been engaged in pastoralism and animal husbandry, with a particular emphasis on buffalo rearing, which forms the backbone of their

livelihood. Seasonal migration between the plains and the hills has historically been a distinctive feature of their lifestyle, enabling them to sustain their livestock and adapt to ecological variations. This pattern of transhumance not only reflects their deep interdependence on natural resources but also shapes their social and cultural identity.

Despite their cultural significance and economic contributions, the Gujjars remain socio-economically disadvantaged. They face persistent challenges such as poverty, lack of access to quality education, inadequate healthcare facilities, poor housing conditions, and limited infrastructural development in their settlements. Their semi-nomadic way of life often excludes them from mainstream development processes, leading to social marginalization and economic vulnerability. Furthermore, their dependence on livestock and forests makes them increasingly vulnerable to environmental changes, restrictions on forest use, and shrinking grazing lands.

The socio-economic status of tribal communities in India has long been a subject of academic inquiry, as these groups often remain at the peripheries of development despite constitutional safeguards and targeted welfare schemes. In Himachal Pradesh, tribal communities constitute approximately 5.7% of the total population, with the Gujjars forming a significant proportion. Unlike other settled tribes of the state, such as the Gaddis, Lahaulis, or Kinnauras, the Gujjars' nomadic lifestyle presents unique challenges that hinder their integration into mainstream socio-economic frameworks. Issues such as lack of permanent habitation, difficulties in accessing schooling for children during migration, and inadequate representation in local governance further deepen their marginalization.

The present study seeks to examine the socio-economic status of the Gujjar tribe in Himachal Pradesh holistically. It provides a descriptive analysis of their living conditions, occupational patterns, income levels, educational attainment, healthcare access, and social mobility. By generating empirical evidence on these aspects, this research not only highlights the everyday struggles of the Gujjars but also contributes to filling the gap in scholarly work related to their community in Himachal Pradesh. Moreover, the study attempts to contextualize their challenges within broader issues of tribal development in India and suggests policy measures that can foster inclusive growth and sustainable livelihoods for this marginalized community.

Gujjar Tribes in Himachal Pradesh

The Gujjars in Himachal Pradesh are a semi-nomadic pastoral tribal community recognized as a Scheduled Tribe, traditionally dependent on animal husbandry, especially buffalo rearing, for their livelihood. They practice seasonal migration between the plains and hills, a lifestyle that has shaped their cultural identity and economic activities. Concentrated mainly in districts like Chamba, Kangra, Sirmour, and Solan, the Gujjars contribute significantly to the state's dairy economy through milk and milk products. However, despite their economic and cultural importance, they face persistent socio-economic challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of healthcare, poor housing, and limited access to infrastructure and government welfare schemes. Their nomadic lifestyle often excludes them from mainstream development processes, leaving them socially and economically marginalized in comparison to other settled tribal groups of the region.

Habitat, Lifestyle & Food Habits of the Gujjar Tribe

The Gujjar tribe in Himachal Pradesh primarily inhabits forested and hilly regions, where they reside either in remote forest clearings or on the fringes of rural settlements. Due to their semi-nomadic character, they rarely build permanent houses and instead live in temporary shelters known as *deras*, simple huts made from wood, grass, and mud—that can be easily dismantled and reconstructed during their seasonal movements. Their lifestyle is deeply connected to pastoralism, with buffalo rearing forming not only the core of their economy but also a symbol of their cultural identity. Seasonal migration, or transhumance, defines their existence: during winters, they descend to lowland pastures where fodder and water are available, while in summers they migrate to higher altitudes with lush grazing grounds for their livestock. This cyclical mobility sustains their herds, ensures access to fresh pastures, and maintains their traditional occupation despite the hardships of a migratory life.

Food habits of the Gujjars reflect their pastoral dependence and simple living. Dairy products such as milk, curd, butter, ghee, and buttermilk form the staple of their daily diet, as well as a primary source of income when sold in nearby villages and towns. Grains like wheat, maize, and rice are consumed as supplementary food, often procured through trade or local markets rather than extensive cultivation, since their migratory lifestyle limits farming activities. They prepare simple dishes, often centered on milk-based products, which provide them with the required nutrition and energy for their labor-intensive pastoral work. Meat consumption is minimal and generally avoided due to cultural and religious practices, though occasionally, goat meat may be consumed during festivals or special occasions. Overall, the Gujjars' habitat, lifestyle, and food habits highlight their close interdependence with nature, livestock, and mobility, distinguishing them from other settled tribal groups of Himachal Pradesh.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the economic status of the Gujjar tribe in Himachal Pradesh, including household income and occupational patterns.
2. To examine the access to basic amenities such as healthcare, housing, and infrastructure.
3. To identify the socio-economic challenges faced by the Gujjar tribe and propose policy recommendations for their upliftment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a holistic understanding of the socio-economic status of the Gujjar tribe. Further, the study was conducted in the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh with a significant Gujjar population.

Analysis and Interpretation of Housing

Table No. 1: - Distribution of Respondents According to Type of House

Types of Houses	Respondents	Percentage
Kucha	36	72%
Semi- Pucca	10	20%
Pucca	4	8%
Total	50	100%

Source: - Field Survey

The table reveals that a significant majority (72%) of Gujjars in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, live in Kucha houses, which are made from local, less durable materials, indicating a reliance on traditional, substandard housing. Only 20% reside in semi-pucca houses, which offer slightly better construction, while a minimal 8% live in pucca houses, built with permanent materials like brick and concrete. This

distribution suggests limited access to quality housing and infrastructure, reflecting potential socio-economic challenges and a need for targeted interventions to improve living conditions, promote better housing materials, and increase access to financial support for house construction in the region.

Table No. 2: Income-wise Distribution of Respondents

Monthly Income	Respondents	Percentage
Below 5000	12	24%
5000-10000	22	44%
10,000-15000	7	14%
15000- 20000	5	10%
Above 20000	4	8%
Total	50	100%

Source: - Field Survey

The table shows that the majority of Gujjars in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, earn between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 per month, with 44% of respondents falling into this income range. A significant portion (24%) earns below ₹5,000, indicating a substantial portion of the community lives below the poverty line or faces financial hardship. Fewer respondents earn higher amounts, with 14% earning between ₹10,000 and ₹15,000, 10%

earning between ₹15,000 and ₹20,000, and just 8% earning above ₹20,000. This income distribution suggests a predominantly low-to-middle-income community with limited financial resources, highlighting the need for economic development programs, job creation, and social welfare initiatives to improve their financial well-being and overall living standards.

harsh and require an adequate heating system. There are different types of fuel, but firewood is common and most people use it as it is readily available in the tribal areas.

Types of Fuel

Using the fuel for cooking and heating in winter is an essential amenity for the people, especially those who live at higher altitudes in the Himalayas. Winters in tribal regions are quite

Table No. 3: Distribution of the Respondents as per Types of Fuel

Types of Fuel	Respondents	Percentage
Fire Wood	18	36%
Cow dung Cakes	16	32%
Kerosene	9	18%
LPG Gas	7	14%
Total	50	100%

Source: - Field Survey

The table highlights the types of fuel used by Gujjars in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, revealing a reliance on traditional and non-modern energy sources. A significant 36% of respondents primarily use firewood, while 32% depend on cow dung cakes, which are locally available and commonly used in rural areas for cooking and heating. Kerosene is used by 18% of respondents, reflecting limited access to cleaner or more modern fuels, and only 14% use LPG gas, indicating a low penetration of cleaner cooking methods. This fuel distribution underscores economic

constraints, limited infrastructure, and the community's dependence on traditional, often less environmentally friendly, energy sources. It highlights a need for improved access to clean energy alternatives, government subsidies for LPG, and awareness campaigns on sustainable fuel usage to improve both health and environmental outcomes.

Toilet facility

A toilet facility is an important prerequisite of a civilized society. It indicates the actual socio-economic profile of the people. It

It was found that only a few respondents did not have a toilet facility at their homes.

Table No.-4: Distribution of the Respondents as per Toilet Facility

Toilet Facility	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	42	84%
No	8	16%
Total	50	100%

Source: - Field Survey

The table shows that a large majority (84%) of Gujjars in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, have access to toilet facilities, which indicates significant progress in sanitation compared to other rural areas where open defecation is still common. However, 16% of respondents still lack toilet facilities, highlighting a gap in sanitation infrastructure that could affect

public health and hygiene. While the high percentage of access suggests that sanitation programs or initiatives have been effective in the region, the remaining percentage without toilets points to the need for continued efforts to ensure universal access to proper sanitation, especially in remote or underserved areas.

Drinking Water

Table No. 5: Source of Drinking Water Used by the Respondents

Drinking Water Source	Respondents	Percentage
Government Hand Pumps/Tube Wells/Taps.	6	12%
Wells/Boreholes/Water Tanks	5	10%
Springs	39	78%
Total	50	100%

Source: - Field Survey

The table reveals that the majority of Gujjars in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, rely on natural sources for drinking water, with 78% of respondents depending on springs. This indicates that local springs are a vital water source for the community, possibly due to the mountainous terrain and limited infrastructure in rural areas. Only 12% of respondents have access to government-provided water through hand pumps, tube wells, or taps, and a smaller portion (10%) use wells, boreholes, or water tanks. This suggests limited access to formal, treated water systems, which could raise concerns about water quality and sanitation. The heavy reliance on springs also makes the community vulnerable to fluctuations in water availability due to seasonal changes or environmental factors, underscoring the

need for improved water infrastructure and conservation measures.

Lighting

Lighting is an important necessity for a man. The source of lighting has evolved from one generation to another. Fire ignited from the wood was used as a source for lighting by early man. For many centuries, earthen oil lamps were used for lighting. However, with the change in living, the earthen oil lamp has gone out of practice. Electricity is available to the majority of people in towns and villages these days. Apart from electricity, fuel and other sources like candles, lanterns, etc. were found to be the next popular source of lighting.

Table No. 6 Source of Light Used by the Respondents

Source of Light	Respondents	Percentage
With Meter Connection	0	0
Without Meter Connection	38	76%
Fuel and Other Sources	12	24%
Total	50	100%

Source: - Field Survey

The table indicates that a significant 76% of Gujjars in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, do not have metered electricity connections, relying instead on non-grid sources for lighting. This suggests limited access to reliable and formal electricity services, likely due to infrastructure challenges in rural or remote areas. Meanwhile, 24% of respondents use fuel and other alternative sources of light, such as kerosene or traditional methods, highlighting the community's dependence on less

efficient and potentially hazardous lighting options. The absence of metered connections for the majority reflects a gap in energy access, pointing to the need for expanded electrification programs, renewable energy solutions, and efforts to improve energy infrastructure to ensure reliable and safe lighting for all households.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the socio-economic analysis of the Gujjar tribe in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, highlights significant challenges faced by this semi-nomadic pastoral community. Despite their cultural importance and contributions to the local economy, the Gujjars live under economically marginal conditions, with low household incomes, reliance on traditional occupations like animal husbandry, and limited access to modern infrastructure. The community's housing, education, sanitation, and energy access remain suboptimal, with a predominant reliance on firewood, cow dung cakes, and springs for basic needs. While there have been advancements in certain areas, such as toilet facilities, the overall lack of access to metered electricity, clean drinking water, and improved housing underscores the urgent need for targeted policy interventions and infrastructure development. To enhance their socio-economic status, a comprehensive approach focusing on education, healthcare, sustainable livelihoods, and clean energy access is essential for ensuring inclusive growth and improving their overall quality of life.

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