

Evaluating Government Schemes and Policies for the Gujjar Tribe in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The Gujjar tribe, one of the major Scheduled Tribes in Himachal Pradesh, continues to face socio-economic marginalization despite various government interventions aimed at tribal upliftment. This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of government schemes and policies targeted toward the Gujjar community in the state. Drawing upon both primary and secondary data, the research investigates the extent of awareness, accessibility, and impact of welfare initiatives on education, health, housing, employment, and livelihood among the Gujjars.

Keywords: - Tribes, Upliftment, Community, Programme and Policies

Introduction

The tribal population of Himachal Pradesh constitutes an essential part of the state's demographic and cultural diversity. Among these, the Gujjars traditionally nomadic pastoralists represent a significant tribal group, primarily residing in districts such as Chamba, Solan, Kangra, and Sirmaur. Despite their Scheduled Tribe status, Gujjars continue to lag behind in several human development indicators including education, healthcare, housing, and employment. To address these disparities, both the Central and State Governments have launched numerous welfare schemes and development policies specifically targeting Scheduled Tribes.

However, the actual benefits reaching the Gujjar community remain inconsistent and uneven. Factors such as poor implementation, lack of awareness, geographic isolation, and cultural barriers hinder the effectiveness of these schemes. This study aims to assess the reach and impact of existing government schemes on the Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh and to identify the gaps that need to be addressed for improved outcomes. Understanding the socio-economic realities of Gujjars and the functioning of tribal welfare programs is crucial for building inclusive policies that respond to their specific needs and challenges.

Objectives

1. To examine the major government schemes and policies aimed at the welfare of Scheduled Tribes in Himachal Pradesh, with specific reference to the Gujjar community.
2. To assess the level of awareness and participation of Gujjars in these welfare schemes.

- To evaluate the effectiveness and impact of selected schemes in improving the socio-economic conditions of Gujjar households.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive research design, relying entirely on secondary data to evaluate the government schemes and policies targeted at the Gujjar tribe in Himachal Pradesh. The research aims to critically examine the formulation, coverage, and effectiveness of welfare programmes by analyzing official documents, statistical data, and government evaluations.

Table 1: Scheduled Tribes and Gujjar Population

State Name	T/R/U	Total Population		
		Person	Male	Female
Himachal Pradesh		6856509	3473892	3382617
All Scheduled Tribes	Total	3,92,126	1,96,118	1,96,008
All Scheduled Tribes	Rural	3,74,392	1,86,896	1,87,496
All Scheduled Tribes	Urban	17,734	9,222	8,512
Gujjar	Total	92,547	47,576	44,971
Gujjar	Rural	90,247	46,293	43,954
Gujjar	Urban	2,300	1,283	1,017

Source: 2011 census

The table provides a detailed overview of the distribution of Scheduled Tribes and the Gujjar population in Himachal Pradesh by sex and area. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of the state is 68,56,509, comprising 34,73,892 males and 33,82,617 females. The Scheduled Tribe (ST) population stands at 3,92,126, with an almost equal gender distribution 1,96,118 males and 1,96,008 females. The majority of the ST population (3,74,392) resides in rural areas, while only 17,734 live in urban regions. Among the rural ST population, there are 1,86,896 males and 1,87,496 females, showing a balanced gender ratio, whereas in urban areas, 9,222 are males and 8,512 are females. The Gujjars, who are a part of the Scheduled Tribes, number 92,547 accounting for 1.39% of the state's total population with 47,576 males and 44,971 females. A significant majority (97.46%) of Gujjars live in rural areas, totaling 90,247 individuals, including 46,293 males and 43,954 females. The remaining 2.54% (2,300 individuals) reside in urban areas, with 1,283 males and 1,017 females. This distribution highlights the rural-centric lifestyle of the Gujjar community and the near parity in gender across both tribal and Gujjar populations.

Table 2: Gujjars by Gender and Districts (%)

Area name	Total Population		
	Person	Male	Female
Bilaspur	11.1	11.1	11.1
Chamba	10.6	10.7	10.5
Hamirpur	3	2.9	3.1
Kangra	12.3	12.1	12.5
Kinnaur	0	0	0
Kullu	1.3	1.4	1.3
Lahaul & Spiti	0	0	0
Mandi	12.2	11.8	12.6
Shimla	3.4	3.5	3.3
Sirmaur	11.4	11.6	11.2
Solan	25.6	25.9	25.4
Una	9.1	9.1	9
Himachal Pradesh	100	100	100

Source: 2011 census

The table highlights the distribution of the Gujjar population across various districts in Himachal Pradesh, along with gender-wise proportions. Solan district accounts for the highest share of the Gujjar population, contributing 25.6% of the total, with males and females comprising 25.9% and 25.4%, respectively. Kangra ranks second with 12.3% of the Gujjar population, where males make up 12.1% and females 12.5%. Mandi follows closely with a 12.2% share, including 11.8% males and 12.6% females. Hamirpur contributes 3% to the total Gujjar population, with male and female proportions at 2.9% and 3.1%, respectively. Bilaspur contributes 11.1%, showing an equal male and female distribution. Chamba holds a 10.6% share, with 10.7% males and 10.5% females. Sirmaur represents 11.4% of the state's Gujjar population, with male and female proportions at 11.6% and 11.2%, respectively. Notably, the districts of Lahaul & Spiti and Kinnaur have a negligible Gujjar presence and do not significantly contribute to the community's overall demographic in the state.

Schemes for Gujjars in Himachal Pradesh

Government policies play a vital role in enhancing the socio-economic status of Scheduled Tribes. As a recognized Scheduled Tribe in Himachal Pradesh, the Gujjar community is entitled to benefit from various development programmes initiated by both the Central and State Governments, including special schemes focused on tribal welfare. However, previous surveys indicate that the Gujjars continue to remain economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged despite the existence of these schemes.

The Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh, due to their traditionally nomadic lifestyle, were initially excluded from the list of Scheduled Tribes by both the Advisory Committee (1965) and the Joint Select Committee. The exclusion was based on the reasoning that the Gujjars were nomadic and did not exhibit conventional tribal characteristics. However, in January 2003, the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, officially reclassified the Gujjars as a Scheduled Tribe. Following this recognition, the Himachal Pradesh government introduced special measures to ensure their protection and development. These initiatives were implemented under integrated tribal development programmes, focusing on improving access to basic healthcare, education, and economic opportunities, while also safeguarding the community against injustice and exploitation.

Safe Drinking Water

Ensuring access to safe drinking water remains a key priority for the State Government. To achieve this, efforts have been made to supply water from treated sources and to install hand pumps in areas facing water scarcity. Additionally, water ATMs have been set up at select key locations. However, some members of the Gujjar community in the Tissa block of Chamba district still lack access to these facilities. They continue to rely on traditional sources such as “Chasame” (natural springs flowing from hilltops) or nearby rivers for their drinking water needs.

Public Distribution System

The State Government has been actively strengthening the Public Distribution System (PDS) to ensure that all sections of the population, especially those in remote and tribal areas, have access to essential commodities at affordable prices. Through a wide network of 4,608 Fair Price Shops across the state, the government distributes key items such as rice, wheat, sugar, kerosene, pulses, and edible oil to eligible beneficiaries under various welfare schemes. To further enhance reach, especially in geographically challenging regions, the government also operates mobile ration shops. These mobile units play a crucial role in servicing hard-to-reach tribal belts like Bharmaur and Tissa in Chamba district, where road connectivity is poor and access becomes even more difficult during the harsh winter months. Before the onset of winter, special efforts are made to stockpile and distribute rations in these areas to ensure that no household is left without basic supplies during snowbound periods. These initiatives reflect the government’s commitment to food security and equitable distribution, particularly for vulnerable communities residing in difficult terrains.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Programme

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme is a crucial government initiative aimed at improving maternal and child health, nutrition, and early childhood education. Initially launched in a single block of the tribal district of Kinnaur, it has now been expanded to cover all 78 Child Development Blocks across Himachal Pradesh. The programme targets children in the age group of 0–6 years, aiming to enhance their nutritional and health status, while also laying a strong foundation for their psychological, physical and social development. A key goal of ICDS is to reduce the incidence of infant and child

mortality, malnutrition, morbidity, and school dropouts by ensuring coordinated implementation across various departments involved in child welfare. One of the programme's important objectives is to educate mothers and strengthen their capacity to care for their children's health and nutritional needs.

The ICDS scheme offers a comprehensive package of services including supplementary nutrition, non-formal preschool education, immunization, health check-ups, referral services, and nutrition and health education. These services are delivered through a network of anganwari centres, managed by trained anganwari workers and helpers, and supported by community-based structures and self-help groups to ensure local participation and outreach. While the programme provides for cooked meals to children under six, as well as to pregnant women, lactating mothers, and adolescent girls, it was observed during the survey that only packet food (commonly sattu) is being distributed in many areas. As per the nutritional guidelines, children are to be provided with 500 calories and 12–15 grams of protein per day, while pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls should receive 600 calories and 18–20 grams of protein. Malnourished children are entitled to a higher intake of 800 calories and 20–25 grams of protein. However, field observations revealed that these prescribed norms are frequently violated in the study areas and even at the state level. Many Gujjar-dominated villages are situated in remote, hilly terrains with poor road connectivity, and in such cases, services are provided by anganwari workers from nearby villages who travel to these locations, often limiting the consistency and quality of service delivery. The Nutrition and Health Education component of the ICDS programme is also active in the study regions, promoting awareness about small family norms, maternal care, and family planning through home visits by anganwari workers. These workers engage directly with adolescent girls and women in the age group of 15 to 45 years, providing vital information and support. Immunization is another key element of the programme, offering vaccines to all children under six years of age and pregnant women. ASHA workers conduct health check-ups for expectant mothers, administer iron and folic acid tablets, and refer serious cases of malnutrition or illness to nearby health or maternity centres under the referral services component. While non-formal preschool education is provided in areas with functioning anganwari centres, children from migratory families especially among the Gujjars often miss out on this service due to their seasonal mobility and lack of access to fixed centres.

Social Security Pension Scheme

The Social Security Pension Scheme is one of the key welfare initiatives of the government aimed at providing financial assistance to vulnerable sections of society, including widows, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities. In the study areas, a significant number of Gujjar households have been availing benefits under this scheme, which serves as an essential source of income for those who are unable to earn a livelihood due to age, physical disability, or the loss of a spouse. This scheme plays a particularly important role in the Gujjar community, which often resides in remote, mountainous regions with limited access to regular employment opportunities and basic services. The pension amount, though modest, helps beneficiaries meet essential daily needs such as food, medicine, and other household expenses. It provides a sense of economic security and dignity, especially for elderly persons

who are no longer active in the workforce and for widowed women who are often left without financial support.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched in Himachal Pradesh as a flagship programme aimed at achieving the goal of universalization of elementary education. Designed to supplement the efforts of the earlier District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), SSA seeks to provide equitable and inclusive access to quality education for all children. Implemented in a mission mode, the programme emphasizes community participation, aiming to strengthen the human development potential of children by ensuring access to quality primary and upper primary education within a defined time frame. To further promote girls' education, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme was introduced under SSA. It aims to empower girls especially from disadvantaged and tribal communities by enhancing their educational access and capabilities in areas such as science, technology, and innovation. However, field observations revealed that most Gujjar families are unaware of the KGBV scheme. Traditional mindsets and socio-cultural barriers continue to restrict the education of Gujjar girls, often limiting their schooling to around 11 years of age, after which they are typically expected to assist in household and domestic chores.

While many nomadic Gujjars, particularly in the Chamba district, have shown a willingness to educate their children, their seasonal migration patterns pose a significant barrier to consistent schooling. Recognizing this challenge, the State Government had introduced mobile schools under SSA, specifically designed to cater to the educational needs of migrant Gujjar children. However, these mobile schools were eventually discontinued due to staff shortages and the inaccessibility of Gujjar settlements located in remote and non-motorable areas. As a result, despite the government's efforts to expand educational access through SSA and KGBV, many Gujjar children, especially girls, remain deprived of consistent and quality formal education. Addressing these challenges requires renewed strategies, including revival of mobile educational units, targeted awareness campaigns, and community engagement to shift cultural attitudes towards education within the Gujjar community.

Ration Cards

Under the Public Distribution System (PDS), ration cards are issued to the head of the household, listing the residential address and details of dependent family members. These cards are categorized based on the economic status of the household. The types include Antyodaya cards for the most economically disadvantaged families (below BPL), BPL cards for those living below the poverty line, and APL cards for families above the poverty line. As per government guidelines, Antyodaya and BPL cardholders, especially those residing in remote and underdeveloped areas, are entitled to receive essential food items at subsidized rates through Fair Price Shops operating under the PDS.

Land for Construction of Houses

Under this scheme, the State Government provides land to houseless individuals belonging to economically weaker sections, with an annual income of less than ₹50,000. Eligible beneficiaries are allotted two biswas of land in urban areas and three biswas in rural areas for the purpose of constructing houses. In addition, the government has made a special provision for the Gujjar community, aimed at encouraging permanent settlement and reducing their traditional nomadic lifestyle. Residential land is allotted to Gujjar families to help them establish stable homes and improve their living conditions. While some Gujjars have embraced this opportunity and are using it to ensure a better future for the next generation through access to education and other services, others continue to follow their migratory traditions, often by selling or abandoning the allotted land, thus missing the intended benefits of the scheme.

Indira Awaas Yojana

The Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), which was operational at the time of the survey, was a flagship social welfare programme launched by the Government of India with the aim of providing housing for the rural poor. The primary objective of the scheme was to eliminate temporary (kuccha) houses in villages across the country by the year 2017. Since then, the scheme has been restructured and renamed, with revised implementation norms.

IAY was a centrally sponsored scheme, based on a cost-sharing model between the Central and State Governments in a 75:25 ratio. Under this scheme, eligible beneficiaries received financial assistance of ₹70,000 in plain areas and ₹75,000 in difficult or hilly regions to support the construction of a pucca house. The scheme primarily targeted Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), freed bonded labourers, minority communities, and non-SC/ST rural households falling under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category. Other eligible groups included widows and next-of-kin of defence or paramilitary personnel killed in action (regardless of income), ex-servicemen, and retired individuals. Despite the inclusive design of the scheme, field findings revealed that only about one percent of Gujjar households in the study area had benefitted from it. This low coverage highlights issues related to awareness, access, and implementation challenges, especially among marginalized and nomadic communities such as the Gujjars.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was enacted by the Government of India in 2005 and came into effect in 2006. The primary objective of this scheme is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per financial year to every rural household whose adult members are willing to undertake unskilled manual work. To avail benefits under the scheme, eligible individuals must be registered with their respective Gram Panchayat, which issues a job card in the name of the household. Based on this registration, wage-based employment is assigned through the Panchayat, and wages for the completed work are directly transferred to the beneficiary's bank account, ensuring transparency and reducing middlemen interference.

While some Gujjar households have been issued job cards under the scheme, instances of exploitation have been reported. In several cases, Gram Pradhans have taken advantage of the illiteracy and lack of awareness among Gujjars. It has been observed that work is falsely recorded in the names of eligible Gujjar beneficiaries, and the payments are withdrawn by the Panchayat authorities. In return, the actual beneficiary is given a small commission, often around ₹500, while the majority of the wage amount is misappropriated. This highlights the need for stronger oversight, transparency, and awareness-building among tribal communities to ensure fair access to the scheme's benefits.

Skill Development Scheme for Unemployed Youth

With the objective of channelizing the potential of youth towards nation-building and reducing their vulnerability to anti-social influences, the State Government has placed special emphasis on involving young people in constructive and productive activities. However, in the absence of meaningful engagement, some youth become susceptible to undesirable and sometimes unlawful practices.

To address this challenge, the government is focusing on providing vocational training and skill development opportunities tailored to the evolving demands of the industrial and service sectors. The scheme offers a skill development allowance to unemployed youth from families with an annual income of less than ₹2 lakh, helping them acquire market-relevant skills that can lead to gainful employment. On completion of the training, youth who wish to pursue self-employment can apply for financial assistance through banks or through institutions like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes Development Corporations.

Despite these initiatives, Gujjar youth particularly those from nomadic backgrounds often remain excluded due to low levels of education and awareness about such schemes. Their limited exposure to formal institutions and hesitation in interacting with mainstream society often leads to a lack of confidence, which hinders their participation in these development programmes. There is a pressing need to enhance outreach, counseling, and awareness efforts to ensure that marginalized communities like the Gujjars can fully benefit from these skill development initiatives.

Mid-Day Meal Scheme

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is the world's largest school-based feeding programme, launched by the Government of India with the primary aim of enhancing enrolment, attendance, and retention among children in primary and upper primary schools. Simultaneously, the scheme seeks to improve the nutritional status of school-going children, particularly those from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Under this scheme, cooked and nutritious meals are provided to children during school hours, which not only help in addressing classroom hunger but also serve as an important incentive for parents to send their children to school. It contributes to better learning outcomes, improved concentration, and overall physical development.

However, a significant section of nomadic Gujjar children are unable to benefit from this scheme, primarily because they are not enrolled in formal schools. The frequent seasonal migration of Gujjar families, lack of permanent residence, and limited access to educational infrastructure in remote areas hinder regular school attendance. As a result, many children from the Gujjar community miss out not only on basic education but also on the nutritional support provided through the Mid-Day Meal Programme. This situation highlights the need for targeted interventions, such as mobile schools, flexible education models, and community-based learning centres, to ensure educational inclusion of nomadic children. Strengthening awareness among Gujjar families about the benefits of school enrolment and the mid-day meal scheme could also play a key role in addressing this gap.

Conclusion

The Gujjar tribe in Himachal Pradesh, despite being recognized as a Scheduled Tribe and eligible for a range of government welfare schemes, continues to face deep-rooted socio-economic marginalization. This study reveals that while numerous programmes ranging from healthcare, education, nutrition, employment to housing exist on paper, their practical implementation remains fraught with challenges. Key findings show that awareness among Gujjar households about their entitlements is limited, largely due to low literacy levels, a nomadic lifestyle, and geographical isolation. In many instances, even when aware, beneficiaries face hurdles such as bureaucratic delays, corruption at the panchayat level, and lack of targeted delivery mechanisms. For example, schemes like MGNREGA, ICDS, and IAY suffer from irregular implementation and inadequate monitoring, while educational initiatives like SSA and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme fail to accommodate the needs of nomadic Gujjar children. Furthermore, mobile schools have been discontinued, and skill development opportunities are underutilized due to cultural and structural barriers. Despite the allocation of land for housing, many Gujjars sell or abandon the land due to their migratory traditions and lack of permanent infrastructure.

In conclusion, while the state has made significant strides in creating a framework for tribal welfare, realizing its full potential for the Gujjar community requires a more inclusive, participatory, and context-sensitive approach. Only then can the promise of equitable development and social justice truly reach this marginalized yet integral part of Himachal Pradesh's tribal population.

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